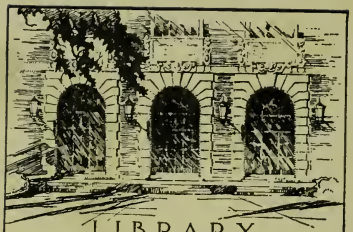
My Connaught Cousins

BY

HARRIETT JAY



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BY THE SAME AUTHOR,

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'The author of "The Queen of Connaught" has again given to the world an interesting and romantic tale. . . . Very original is the charm of the early days of poor Morna's romance, the rugged grandeur of her home, the picturesque habits and primitive ceremonies, the tenderness and ferocity of her melancholy Celtic kindred.'—*Athenæum.*

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'Since Lever and Carleton passed away, we have had little of Irish life in fiction, and that little has lacked character and power. This new writer gives promise of filling the vacant place. . . . This novel contains an unusual mixture of plot and sensation, faithful character, study, and powerful description. A book to be welcomed and read with delight in these times for its freshness of conception, its racy, rattling humour, and its ridiculousness—sometimes so oddly dashed with deep thought—all of which combine to attest an exceptional power on the part of the author.'—*British Quarterly Review.*

'Extremely singular, and quite unlike any other tale that has ever appeared; and it has about it a strange fascination. In reading it, one seems to be transported into some strange land of poetry and romance. . . . Indeed, "The Queen of Connaught" is a series of very skilfully executed pictures, which present a wonderful appearance of reality. Poor Kathleen finds out when dying how mistaken her life has been, and she does not desire to begin it again. She dies in the arms of the faithful husband whom till lately she had never understood, and whose goodness she has never doubted, but whose love has followed her to the end, and will long survive her. A most touching story indeed, full of pathos and full of humour, is this "Queen of Connaught."'—*Morning Post.*

'A story that combines considerable inventiveness, and plot power with racy study of character and fresh picturesque description. . . . Our readers will not fail to be struck by the intimate knowledge of Irish ways and customs, the subtle instinct for the finer distinguishing traits in Irish character; and they will no doubt appreciate also the sense at once of the humour of Irish life, and of the delicacy, the sentiment, and the rough defiance and dare-devilry that are so oddly intermingled in it. . . . Dramatic force is noticeable throughout, no less than true descriptive knack. . . . Alike to those who seek striking incident and picture, and those who seek more solid teaching, "The Queen of Connaught" may be very safely recommended.'—*Nonconformist.*

'A very new subject is treated in this story with great freshness and vivacity. The tale may be said to be a study of the Irish character and temperament; impartial and thoughtful in its intention, and cleverly executed, though the author's contempt for the class of characters chiefly described is visible enough. . . . Nothing can be happier or more graphic than the author's description of the kind of society which frequents O'Mara Castle as soon as Kathleen restores the glories of its ancient hospitality. The humours of the society that flock there, from Timothy Linney, the stately old man who displaces the master of his house from his own chair because he has taken a fancy to it, to Biddy Cranby, the poor crazy woman who starves herself, in both senses of the word, to feed and clothe her children, are painted with a picturesque breadth and liveliness that add sensibly to one's knowledge of human nature itself. . . . It is a most charming study of a subject full of colour, light and shadow, and one that rises steadily in interest up to the close. The third volume is decidedly the best of the three, and the scene which comes most nearly up to the ideal point in power, is the critical scene of the book, where Kathleen, drenched by the storm, and alone, faces the conspirators against her husband's life, in the dreary solitude of their mountain hiding-place. . . . Situations of less intensity are often painted with consummate skill. . . . All are etched with a most faithful and skilful hand. . . . This tale is full of life, skill, and insight.'—*Spectator.*

MY CONNAUGHT COUSINS.

BY

HARRIETT JAY,

AUTHOR OF "THE QUEEN OF CONNAUGHT," "TWO MEN AND A MAID," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THE Authoress of *My Connaught Cousins*, smarting under a certain misconception, but thinking that polemics of any kind ill befit a lady's pen, has asked me to write a few prefatory words explaining how this book and its predecessors came to be written, and how unjust is the charge, made in one influential quarter, that she is an enemy to Irish nationality. The task is a difficult one, especially as I

sympathise more strongly than she does with the present *political* movement, and am, indeed, much more of an advanced Liberal; but we are entirely at one in our sympathy with the social life and aims of the Irish people, and in our love for what is best and noblest in the Irish nature. In these days of haste and folly, anything really original in literature is certain to be misunderstood. When the *Queen of Connaught* appeared, its great and instantaneous success was unconnected with its most sterling characteristic—that of an entirely new (but I believe the only true) reading of the national character and temperament. Subsequent events have justified that reading in an extraordinary manner; and it is clearly understood now that the familiar Irishman of literature and

the stage, the merry, good-humoured "Pat" of a thousand novels and melodramas, was more or less a product of the inner consciousness. In a subsequent but far less successful work, unpopular from its rigid and terrible truth of delineation, the Authoress put her finger on the canker which now, as heretofore, poisons the wholesome life of Ireland; but the *Priest's Blessing*, though neglected now, will live as perhaps the most powerful social study that ever came from the mind of a young girl. No unprejudiced person who reads that work, and takes it in connection with other works from the same pen, will doubt its deep insight—I should say, its unparalleled insight—into the nature of the Irish peasant.

The Authoress of these works went to Ireland when very young, lived for years

in the wildest and loneliest part of the wild and lonely West, and was first inspired to literary effort by what she *saw* and *knew*. Her pictures were drawn from the very life, of which she was all that time a portion. She had no prejudices and no predispositions, and her sympathy, above all, was for the suffering people; and if in her portrayal she often had to describe moral darkness, she did so with a full sense of what was brightest and best on the other side of the picture. Behind the wretchedness and the squalor, the ignorance and the prejudice, beginning in misconception and culminating in crime, she showed the deep tenderness, the devoted patience, the sweetness and the purity, of the Celtic temperament. The characters of Dunbeg in the *Queen of Con-*

naught, of Patrick O'Connor in the *Priest's Blessing*, of James Merton in the present work, are, as living types, unique in literature ; and the infinite pity of literary sympathy was never better exemplified than in the life story of "Madge Dunraven" and "Morna Dunroon," or than in the tender idyll of "How Andy Beg became a Fairy."

Among the first to recognise the unique power of these stories, their fidelity to human nature, and their predominant dramatic power, was one of the foremost moral teachers of this or any time,—Mr Reade. Had they been unveracious, had they been in any sense productions of the inner consciousness, they would never have attracted that most keen-sighted of social observers ; had they lacked sympathy for

their subject, had they been opposed to what was best in Irish life and character they would never have won his approval. But their veracity is vital and will prevail. Meantime, the reader is to be warned that they contain many things, present many pictures, which the false friends and summer lovers of Ireland must naturally regard with suspicion and dislike. The true friends of Ireland, and all those who honestly sympathise with the national aspirations, will find in them that truth which genius only can reveal, and which, when once revealed, is fairer than any falsehood, however brightly drawn.

ROBERT BUCHANAN.

MY CONNAUGHT COUSINS.

CHAPTER I.

IT was midsummer. The hottest sun that had warmed our soil for years shone its brightest upon city and suburb. All my friends were in the country, yet I remained shut up in my chambers, with nothing fairer to gaze upon than the withered grass and drooping trees of a smutty, smoke-begrimed London square. Heigho! It was weary work staying in London when all the world was wandering away

by wood and stream! When I walked out the heat of the pavement scorched the leather of my shoes! The West End streets which I traversed were all deserted save for a few Indian ayahs and dyspeptic-looking gentlemen of the Baystock breed, who evidently existed on curry and red pepper, and felt no sort of discomfort when the thermometer registered one hundred in the shade. It was actually my first experience of summer in town!—that lucky spoon which had been in my possession ever since I was born with it in my mouth, having managed like an enchanter's wand to deposit me every former summer upon the bank of a salmon river or the knolls of a grouse moor. For once, however, my luck had failed me, since, despite their winter's hard work, my hands lay passively in almost empty pockets, and my eyes rested gloomily upon the scorched and grimy streets of Babylon. Babylon without the "waters,"

or anything suggestive of coolness and pastoral rest.

As I mused and sulked, my meditations were disturbed by a step proceeding slowly round the square, and thrusting my head out of the window I beheld the postman. Even his habitually brisk tread had changed that day into a lagging desultory kind of stroll. He came wearily on; he paused before my door.

"Could the letter be for me?" I wondered, having nothing more important to occupy my brain,—for the postman had slipped a missive into the letter-box, given his feeble rat-tat, and strolled vacuously away. I was so much occupied with watching the man's retreating figure, that I was hardly conscious of a step on the stair, a tap at the door, and not until I heard the words,—"A letter, sir, if you please," did I turn my head.

Then it was for me!—a white square envelope, addressed to "John Stedman,

Esq." in a hand which seemed, yet was not altogether, familiar. After scanning the writing I turned to the seal, and then I beheld, printed in small capitals, the word Ballyshanrany, and about it was entwined the triple-leaved shamrock. Having gazed for a few minutes at the mystical emblem, and still more mystical word, I tore open the envelope, and proceeded to acquaint myself with the contents. There were two letters, the first of which ran as follows :—

" Ballyshanrany,
Storport,
County Mayo,
Ireland.

"My dear Nephew, — The girls, ever impatient to make your acquaintance, have for the last ten days been worrying my life out to invite you here. In vain have I protested ; in vain have I told them that a young London barrister must have more engagements than he knows what to do

with; although I have asked you three times already, they declare that the third time is lucky, and that if I send this letter you'll come. So I send it. If you are not already disposed of for the season, I certainly believe you might do worse than spend a few weeks down here. We are homely, but comfortable; I can manage to put you in the way of a little sport;—Kate, who is a capital housekeeper, will see that you are properly fed, and the rest have promised to do what they can to amuse you. There's half-a-dozen of them, remember, but they are not bad colleens as colleens go, and if you come, sure they'll give you a hearty welcome! Think it over, and let us hear from you. Your affectionate uncle, A. KENMARE."

I read the letter twice; then throwing it on the table, I sat down lazily, cigar in mouth, to take my uncle's parting word of advice. I thought over his proposition,

and the more I thought of it, the more I seemed to like it. I felt irresistibly impelled to accept it, at the same time I could not help regretting that I did not know a little more of the relations under whose roof I was invited to reside.

My uncle was an Irishman to the backbone, and, as far as I could gather, as warm-hearted an old fellow as ever trod the soil. Most of his early days had been spent in India, and it was not till rather late in life that he returned, married my mother's youngest sister, and settled down upon his native soil. As far as any family communication was concerned, they might have settled in Kamskatka, for after the marriage they seemed to be exiled entirely from their friends; but we heard from time to time that they were happy, and that strange little faces were appearing upon their hearth. At length one morning—about six years before the day on which my uncle's third invitation fell into my hands—

there came to our house a piece of news which almost broke my mother's heart, for she heard that her favourite sister, after having presented her husband with half-a-dozen daughters, had died, while the sixth little stranger was still a baby at her breast.

After this, the connection of the Kenmares with our branch of the family seemed to cease. We heard little or nothing of them, and I, busily engaged in working my way in the world, almost forgot that such close kin existed at all. I vaguely remembered, now that the circumstance was recalled to my mind, having received two letters of invitation from the old gentleman; but the invitations, coming doubtless at busy times, had never hitherto been tempting enough to draw me to Ireland. I had, consequently, written a polite refusal and dismissed the whole family from my mind.

Now, however, the case was different.

I had nothing to do; I had nowhere to go; I was stifling in the smoky air of London, and longing for a breeze from the sea. Yes, the invitation was certainly tempting; it was one, moreover, which I should have accepted without a moment's hesitation, but for one appalling contingency—the half-dozen girls.

To some young fellows this might have been an inducement; to me it was the contrary. Nature never meant me for a lady's man, and the typical girl of modern life was certainly not to my taste. It was all very well to pass half-an-hour with persons of the other sex in a London drawing-room, but to have to spend one's entire vacation, surrounded by girls, was rather too much of a good thing.

"During the vacation," I reflected, "one wants male society, fair sport, and good cigars. To visit Ballyshanrany simply means that I am to be perpetually bored with half-a-dozen boisterous Irish hoydens.

The invitation, though sorely tempting, won't do for a bashful man. I will write my refusal without a moment's delay."

I rose to carry out my resolution, when my eye, wandering over the carpet, fell upon a folded sheet of paper which lay at my feet. Suddenly I remembered what, until then, I had entirely forgotten,—the second letter which the envelope contained, and which I had never taken the trouble to open at all. I lifted it, unfolded the sheet, and read as follows :—

"Dearest Cousin Jack,—Ever since we read your speech in the paper, we have been dying to see you, so we hope that when you answer papa's letter this time, you will not have the heart to say 'no.' We have not the least idea what you are like; but we have conjured up all sorts of visions which are, no doubt, all wrong; but one thing we have decided, which is that, no matter what you are like, we

mean to look after you just the same as papa. Nora will see to your gun with papa's; Biddy will make cartridges for you, and Aileen will tie you some of her best flies; you shall do just as you like, and if you would rather not be bothered with so many girls, you shall spend nearly all your time alone with papa. But do come! Your affectionate Cousins

KATHLEEN,
NORA,
AILEEN,
OONA,
BRIDGET,
AMY,
Her mark.

"*P.S.*—Excuse the large blot. Amy writes so badly we thought it better to make her put her mark, and in her excitement she made the blot instead, KATHLEEN."

I sat down at once and wrote my reply.

"My dearest little Connaught Cousins,—When I read your father's letter, I intended to refuse his invitation, for I am afraid of girls in general, and the thought of being surrounded by half-a-dozen appalled me ; but since I have read your letter my mind has changed. I have a sort of feeling you must be rather nice, and the temptation to make sure being too great to be resisted, I mean to come. I have a few things to settle before I can leave London, but in about a week from to-day expect me,—Believe me, till then, your affectionate cousin, Jack Stedman."

Having written the above, I added a line to the old gentleman, and the thing was done. In exactly a week from that day, I turned my back on the smoke of London, and set out with heroic heart to try life in the wilds of Connaught.

CHAPTER II.

A DREARY day and a dreary prospect; the air was damp and chilly, and a thin misty rain was falling and slowly penetrating to the skin of the half-clothed little urchins who were either crouching in the doorways or wildly driving along their donkeys loaded with creels of turf.

I was surveying this prospect from the window of the hotel, when the waiter suddenly appeared and announced that the car was at the door to convey me to my journey's end. I found the landlord with a face fit to grace a funeral. From the moment of hearing my place of destination,

he had looked upon me as raving mad, and had accordingly treated me with great forbearance, as a person who was perhaps, on the whole, harmless enough, but not at all responsible for his actions. As for getting any information from him about the place, that was perfectly hopeless. When I approached the subject, he merely answered, "Ah, it is a wild country, sir," sighed deeply, shrugged his shoulders, and walked off, evidently feeling that he had done his duty; and if I was rash enough to go after that, why, I must take the consequences. Around him stood the ostler, the waiter, the boots, and about a dozen little ragged gorsoons, who stared at me with all their might and main, scrambled to obtain the few pence which were scattered amongst them, and uttered a wild Hooroo! as the car rolled away. The landlord's parting sigh was wafted to me on the chilly wind, and had the effect of damping my spirits for at least one half of the

day. So I rolled out of the town of Ballyferry, in the county of Mayo, Ireland, and was soon speeding along westward towards the ocean.

The beginning of the drive was not very enjoyable; the misty rain fell unceasingly, and the chilly wind was gradually awakening rheumatic reminiscences in my bones. The district through which I was passing was truly "a wild country," for the most part flat and boggy, and disfigured here and there by unsightly mounds of fresh-cut turf; yet the recent rain had imparted greenness and freshness to the small patches of pasture, and given tone and richness of colour to the little knolls of purple heather here and there dotted about the unsightly bogs. The dim brown tinge of the melancholy landscape was saddened still more by the dark and lowering atmosphere; not a hill was to be seen, and not a tree; nothing but a dark and dreary waste bordered on either

side by a heavy mist and a threatening sky.

I was on my way to Storport, and in spite of various misadventures by land and sea, I had so far managed to retain my ardent desire to try life in the wilds of Connaught. But I had not been many hours in Ballyferry, the nearest point attainable by rail, and fifty long miles from my destination, when my ardour was considerably damped by the dreary prognostics of O'Shaughnessy, the innkeeper, and his ragged retinue. Even the driver of the car seemed to be affected while under his master's eye; but directly we turned the corner which shut the hotel from sight, his spirits rose considerably. He cracked his whip, shouted, whistled, yelled, and we sped along merrily—soon to be joined by an excited Irishman, dressed in a blue bob-tail coat with brass buttons, knee breeches, and a brimless chimney-pot hat, who was smoking a

very dirty, short pipe, and seated on the back of a donkey. An exciting race ensued. My driver cracked his whip, and whistled; the Irishman brandished his shillelagh and shouted and screamed at the top of his voice, and we rattled along in a perfect shower of mud and rain. The little donkey kept up bravely, and once or twice was on the point of leaving us behind altogether. But at last, after a short but sharp ride, Pat disappeared, with a defiant wave of the shillelagh, down an adjoining road.

After this little distraction, the drive became more and more dreary and uninteresting; the thick mist shut out any view I might have had of the surrounding country; the driver seemed to lose all his spirits, though he still endeavoured in a moody way to urge the horses on. Hoping to put a little life into him, I handed him a drink from my flask, and told him to take it easy, as the horses

were perhaps rather tired after their late race, but he had evidently no intention of letting them "take it easy," for he whipped and shouted louder than ever; then he turned to me and breathlessly exclaimed,—

"Faith, sor, the lazy beasts must make better speed than they're doing, or we'll never reach the river before night."

"Well, suppose we don't, it's not such a dreadful place, I suppose?"

"Troth, it is though," he answered emphatically; "the river is tidal, and when it is swollen with the rain, the current is strong enough to sweep the horses off their legs. It's a dangerous place; steep hills on both sides, and a rough, broken road; one false step would may-be lead to your death. Did your honor not hear about it in Ballyferry?"

"Not a word. Have you ever crossed it before?"

"Only once, your honor. I was taking some young colleens across—it was these

ponies I had; when we got into the water, one of the traces broke, and the whole weight fell on the one pony. It was a mercy she was a quiet and strong beast, and she managed to carry us through. It had been a dry season, and the water was low, and the tide was out, or, Lord, I think we should have been killed, for the poor beast could never have stood against the current with such a load on her back."

"And do you think it is much swollen to-day?"

"Faith, I do then, for not one dry day have we seen for eight weeks; but we'll just stop here and ask about it from a man I know."

Suiting the action to the word, he accordingly pulled up before a little thatched cottage which stood on the roadside, and called out some mystical sentence in Irish. After this had been repeated once or twice, a queer, smoke-dried looking old man made his appearance, and answered in the same

unknown tongue. A conversation thereupon ensued, which, to judge from the despairing looks of the driver, was scarcely of an agreeable nature. At last he explained to me that things looked as black as they could possibly be; the tide was in, the river was dreadfully swollen by the recent rain, and we would most probably not be able to cross before midnight, when the tide would be out. On hearing all this, I decided to go on and reconnoitre, as we might after all be able to get through, and if the worst came we must just camp on the banks until daybreak. So after again receiving the cheering information, "It's to a wild country your honour's goin'," I once more sped on my way.

As the weather still showed no signs of clearing, I rolled myself comfortably in my rugs, and prepared to take a slight doze; but just as I was dropping into a quiet sleep, I was suddenly called back to this fretful world by a frightful babble of voices,

and the car coming to a full stop. On looking up to ascertain the cause of the delay, I saw that I was close on the banks of a stream which rushed down with great force between two steep hills. On the opposite bank stood half-a-dozen ragged-looking Irishmen, wildly gesticulating and shouting out unintelligible words which were almost drowned in the roar of the waters. I looked around to the driver for an explanation, but he had disappeared from the box, and was down at the water's edge answering his Irish friends in their own wild way. My first fears were at once confirmed; this, then, was the river. But how were we to cross it? It was so swollen by the continual rain and the full tide, that it seemed simply impossible for the horses to get through. With a quickly beating heart, I anxiously watched the faces of the men as they carried on their excited conversation. Then one of them commenced to sound the passage, by sticking in a long

stick. This proceeding was not of the slightest use, apparently, as he could not reach half a yard beyond the bank, but it evidently satisfied his companions, and after a little more shouting and waving the driver returned and announced his intention of crossing.

"The boys think we had better make a dash at it," he said, "and we'll maybe come through safe—for if we wait for days we'll never have a better chance."

"But do you think these men are to be trusted?" I asked.

"Faith, are they no, sir," he answered indignantly; "they've all the O'Donnell blood in their veins, and if I bade them lift the ponies and *carry* them over, they'd never refuse."

Silenced at once by this proof of clannish fidelity, I allowed him to prepare the car, and when all was ready, I screwed up my courage to the highest pitch, and bravely took my seat by his side. The horses went

down the hill at a spanking rate, and so steep was the descent, that once or twice I felt that the car would certainly be overturned; but the roughness of the road acted as a sort of drag, and saved us from any catastrophe.

Then we entered the river! such a splashing, jolting, and shouting was never heard! Only the horses' backs were above water, and the car was half buried. However, they brought us safely through, galloped furiously up the steep ascent beyond, never once pausing until they stood panting and steaming on the top of the hill. I glanced back and shuddered at the ugly place through which I had come, then I inquired how far it was to Storport.

"Ten miles," was the quiet reply; "but there is a little shebeen close by where we will take a rest."

The shebeen referred to was a tiny thatched hut standing in the roadside bog. When I first entered the room, the turf

smoke was so thick that I could see nothing ; but after a few moments my eyes grew more accustomed to it, and I could discern the bright flames of a fire which was burning in the middle of the floor, the smoke issuing through a hole in the roof. Over the fire was a large black cauldron suspended from a thick, black iron chain which hung from the rafters; and around it sat on their hams several old women with their elbows on their knees, all smoking short clay pipes very black with age, and chattering away in Irish. The whole scene forcibly reminded me of the "Witch scene" in "Macbeth," only the cauldron, instead of containing mystic ingredients, was filled with substantial potatoes. The floor of the other half of the room was strewn with straw, on which reposed two pigs, a sheep, a horse, and any number of hens.

I speedily escaped into the fresh air to examine the state of the weather and the country.

The thin misty rain still fell, but the lowering sky had begun to brighten and to show signs of clear weather coming. The landscape was of the same flat and boggy description as it had been throughout the journey; nothing to enliven the scene; not even a stone wall to vary the monotony of the desert land—all was dull, flat, and unprofitable. The very road was almost a bog, so sodden was it by the continual rain; and outside the door of the hut the pigs and ducks were waddling in the mire. The prospect so damped my spirits, that I hailed with joy the appearance of the horses. They were led by an old man, dressed in the usual bob-tail coat and brimless hat, who addressed me with a queer mixture of dignity and respect.

"You're going to Storport, sir?" he said, touching his brimless hat in a stately military manner.

"Yes."

"It's a wild country, sir!"

I turned my eyes on the surrounding prospect.

"If it's wilder than this," I involuntarily exclaimed, "it must be wild indeed."

"You see, sir," he continued, "here we lie snug and low, and the wind can't very well get at us, but, in troth, sir, at Storport—"

I heard no more, for driven to desperation by the reiteration of these dreary prophecies, I jumped on to the car and drove away.

The dismal vapours gradually cleared off, and ere long we got a peep of sunshine. The land was less barren, and here and there it was relieved by pastures and grassy hillocks. As we rolled along the hillocks gradually disappeared, and were replaced by heathery mountains. At last I was aroused by the joyful words,—

"This is Storport, sir;" and I caught my first sight of the little village.

One glance convinced me that Storport had been libelled by my roadside inform-

ants. The bad effects of the dreary prophecies which I had heard vanished from my mind as I beheld the quiet little haven of beauty which opened out before my delighted gaze.

The car had come to a standstill on the top of the hill. I turned to the man, and asked if we had many miles further to go.

"Sorra mile, or half a mile either," was the reply.

"Can you see the house, then?"

"I cannot, yer honor, but I can see the chimbleys of it! See there, sir," he added, pointing to a clump of trees, from the midst of which streaks of smoke were issuing, "*that* is Ballyshanrany!"

"Point me out the nearest route to the house," I said to the driver. "I'll finish the journey on foot."

I leapt from the car as I spoke, and, having ordered him to follow with my luggage, I took a path which he pointed out to me across the bog. It was certainly

a very short cut; a walk of ten minutes brought me to the road again, and I found myself standing close to an iron gate, the private entrance to the grounds.

I had raised my hand to open the gate, when the silence all around me was suddenly broken by a silvery peal of laughter. I waited till it ceased, then I laid my hand upon the gate, which swung back noiselessly upon its hinges, and entered the grounds.

I could see nothing, for tall trees rose on either side, and the broad carriage drive, which I trod, took a sudden and sharp curve; the house was completely hidden; I walked quietly on; then I turned the curve, and came in full view of the dwelling.

The house, a plain, two-storeyed building, built of stone quarried from the bog, and roofed with slate, was almost buried in a profusion of ivy and flowers; all the windows and doors stood open, and around them clustered roses and fuschias in full bloom. Before the front door was a rather

neglected - looking lawn, gazing beyond which one beheld the blue of the open sea. The front door stood wide open, and on the threshold was spread a couple of bearskin rugs, seated on which, amidst the wealth of snow-white hair, was a little girl about five or six years old. She sat cross-legged, facing a number of dogs, which clustered eagerly before her,—dogs of all sizes and conditions, from one huge St Bernard down to the veriest mite of a terrier that ever worried at the life of a rat. It was the laughter of this little witch which had already reached me; she was putting some of the dogs through their tricks, and every time they made a mistake she clapped her hands and laughed aloud.

"Cousin number one!" I commented mentally, drawing back in the shelter of the trees, and gazing with amused eyes upon the child. I remembered, as I did so, the blot and the cross which had disfigured my much-prized letter, and having decided this

little one's identity, I looked around for cousin number two.

I had not far to look.

A few yards from the door stood a small wicker table, strewn with powder, shot, wads, cartridge cases, etc., and at this table sat a young girl busily at work making cartridges. Again I mentally referred to my letter, and after having done so, I had little difficulty in recognising my cousin Bridget. She was certainly not so pretty as little Amy, who, with her warm brown skin, her sparkling black eyes and glossy hair, would have made a model which any painter might have been proud of. Still Bridget was not at all bad looking, and if she had been seen alone and not by the side of her little witch of a sister, she would have certainly demanded a second glance. But she had disadvantages to contend against, which had not yet come Amy's way. She was at that age when the figure has taken no definite form, when

the arms and legs appear too long and dresses can never be made to fit; nevertheless, she had laughing blue eyes and a pleasant face, which she had contrived to disfigure by cropping off all her hair. Yes, I instinctively felt that in Bridget I had not discovered the beauty of the family, but I had quite made up my mind that we should be excellent friends.

Then I took another peep.

This time I was disappointed.

I was about to move forward, and boldly proclaim my presence, when my eye fell upon a sight which held me captive.

Not very far from the table at which Biddy was so busily engaged, was a hammock swung up to the branches of two saplings, and in the hammock, lying at full length, with her head supported on her two clasped hands, was another of my Connaught cousins.

About seventeen years of age, tall and

thin, with a skin like alabaster, and hair of rich warm gold. She was dressed in a robe of white, which was daintily trimmed with lace, and here and there a knot of rose-coloured ribbon. Through the open work of the sleeves and boddice, you could see the warm tints of arms and neck. Her golden hair fell loosely on her shoulders, while her eyes gazed dreamily to the cloudy sky above. At last I had certainly come upon the beauty of the family, for no maiden, however fair, could be more charming.

For a moment I stood gazing as if spell-bound, then I resolutely walked forward, and in one word made myself known.

Heavens! what a change!

Amy leaped up from her rug. Biddy from her table, and Oona—as I heard the others call the beautiful dreamer—slipt quietly from her hammock, and came forward smiling with the rest!

There was a moment, just a moment of confused silence, then a wild cry of—

"Kate, Kate, do come out! Here's cousin Jack!"

What happened after that I don't exactly know, but I was conscious of the presence of a somewhat buxom young woman of twenty, who stood in the doorway, addressed me as "Cousin Jack," and offered me her hand to shake and her cheek to kiss. Afterwards, using a cousin's privilege, I proceeded to kiss a few more cheeks, amongst which was the pretty pink and white one belonging to Oona, who, having recovered from her first start of surprise at my presence, accepted my salute with all the frankness of a child. To what length my ardour would have gone I am not prepared to say. I felt quite willing, however to kiss them all round again, if necessary, but my good intentions were summarily interrupted by the arrival of the car which I had deserted on the road, and which now appeared with my luggage.

More confusion, more delighted laughter,

and more words of welcome! At a summons from Kate there appeared upon the scene a couple of neatly-dressed servant-maids and a wild-looking Connaught boy; one and all chattered to the driver in their unearthly tongue, while they possessed themselves of my goods.

It must not be supposed that the girls were idle. Kate,—calm, self-possessed Kate, who had evidently been disturbed at her housekeeping — superintended the removal of my luggage, and gave her orders about it in the Irish language. Biddy was carrying in my fishing-rod, and a few loose parcels which were on the car. Oona was lifting down, with very tender hands, my strap full of books, while Amy, after having with a great deal of trouble silenced her yelping canine family, was staggering in beneath the weight of my ulster.

It was certainly a new experience to me, but by no means an unpleasant one. Had I been more accustomed to female society,

and kept my wits about me, I should never have allowed those pretty girls to turn themselves into serving-maids on my account; but the novelty of the situation perfectly took away my breath and rendered me powerless. So I stood and looked on, feeling very much like a powerful Sultan, attended by the ladies of his court.

At length the work was done. All my packages, both great and small, had been carried to my room; the horses which had brought me thither had been led away to the stables, where they were to pass the night; and I stood in the spacious hall surrounded by the girls.

"So you are my Connaught cousins?" I said, looking at the cluster of up-turned faces. "I must say, my dears, you are excessively jolly girls! But I understood there were six of you; where are the missing two?"

"Nora and Aileen," said Kate, smiling, "are out riding, and papa has driven over

to the moor; but," she added, glancing at the face of a very old-fashioned clock which stood in the hall, "he'll be in to dinner in less than half-an-hour,—and won't he be astonished to find you here!"

"Will he?"

"Why, of course he will; do you suppose, if you had written to say you were coming, we should have allowed you to arrive like this? I had arranged to send the car over to Ballyferry for you; it would have stayed there all night, and brought you back the next day. Papa, Aileen, and Nora, were to ride as far as Glenderig to have taken you some lunch, which you could have eaten there, and escorted you back. And to think that, after all, you should take us by surprise!"

I explained to Kate that I *had* written, fixing not only the day, but the hour of my arrival at Ballyshanrany. Kathleen did not seem the least astonished, but she looked rather more annoyed.

"It's that Mickie the post!" she said. "Sure it's time the work was taken away from him altogether, for he gets worse and worse. He hasn't brought me a letter for the last year that wasn't a month old at least. Last night he didn't deliver the letters at all. Shawn saw him at old Cormic's wake. Oh, cousin Jack, what inhospitable people you must have thought us to be sure!"

I laughingly dispelled her fears, and in order to make things comfortable amongst us, I volunteered to say "How do you do?" all round again; the girls responded with heartiness to my offer of shaking hands; when I offered to repeat my osculatory performance they laughingly drew back.

"Well!" I exclaimed, "I must hold to what I said just now. You are certainly nice girls—nobody would attempt to deny it—but you are not girls of your word. Wouldn't you let your father kiss you?"

"Of course we would."

"And did you not promise in your letter to treat me like papa?"

"Ah! yes," said Kate bluntly; "but then we hadn't seen you, and we thought you were more like him."

"Indeed, and what made you think I was like him?"

"Well, you are a barrister, you know, and we had decided amongst ourselves that all barristers must be old-fashioned, whereas you are quite young and—and—"

"And very handsome," added Amy candidly. "*I'll* kiss you, cousin Jack."

All the girls laughed, and said Amy's conduct was shameless, while I lifted her on to a chair and kissed her brown cheek not once but half-a-dozen times, after which she generously volunteered to conduct me to my rooms.

CHAPTER III.

THE lodge, though by no means palatial-looking from the outside, must have been decidedly roomy within, since Kate had been able to set aside two very comfortable chambers for my sole and special use. The first room which I entered was a bedroom, furnished and fitted in a manner to suit the taste of the most fastidious of men. Everything was bright, clean, pleasant, and significant of a woman's careful hand. There were pretty lace draperies at the window, and snow-white hangings to the bed, freshly-plucked flowers on the dressing-table, while around

the open casement clustered full-blown roses and fuchsias, the scent of which filled the room. On putting my head out of the window and looking down, I saw Oona's hammock, containing now only a half-open book, Biddy's table covered with half-made cartridges, and one or two of Amy's dogs. Looking straight forward, I beheld a boundless expanse of sea.

Having finished my survey of the bedchamber, I passed on into the tiny room adjoining, which was evidently intended for my private sitting-room or study. There was no sign of the dressing-room about it, and the efforts of the girls had evidently been exerted to make it as great a contrast as possible to the dimity whiteness of my sleeping-chamber.

It was the smallest and cosiest of rooms. A comfortable carpet covered the floor; the furniture was of plain oak, but there was a sofa and easy-chair; on the mantelpiece, besides a brazen timepiece, was a jar full of

bird's-eye tobacco and a box of cigars; and on the table, which was covered with a neat table-cloth, were a number of books. I glanced at the books, which had doubtless been selected for my special reading, and found them to consist of a New Testament, a guide-book to Connemara, Lord Byron's Poems (expurgated family edition, with Oona's name written on the fly-leaf), and an Irish treatise on fly-fishing. Nor was this all. Close to the window stood a pretty mahogany writing-desk, where I found stationery, ink, pens, stamps, and even sheets of folios for scribbling, and a bronze reading lamp. There were more flowers here, both in the room and clustering outside the window, while the green trailing creepers contrasted pleasantly with the warm red curtains within.

"My lines have fallen in pleasant places," I said, casting a last look around. Then, remembering Kate's words, "In half-an-hour papa will be in to dinner," I deemed the

best thing I could do would be to put myself in order for the family meal.

I re-entered my bedroom, laid out my things, pulled off my coat, and unbuttoned my collar, when my operations were suddenly stopped,—for the sounds which issued from below announced the arrival of the missing members of the family.

I looked out.

First a couple of horses cantered up the gravel walk, and paused before the hall-door, then I heard the rattling of carriage-wheels, after which a hearty voice exclaimed,—

"What! you don't mean to say he's arrived, Kate! God bless my soul, where is he?"

A minute afterwards I heard a good sound rap at my door, and, on opening it, I beheld my uncle.

One glance, and my heart went out to him; he was a man whom nobody could dislike. He was adored by all his tenantry,

and idolised by his girls. Now, for the first time, I could understand why my mother's petted sister had been induced to marry a man just twice her age. I could understand also the unaffected candour of the girls. Kenmare was a gentleman from head to foot, but there was no vestige in him of self-consciousness or affectation. He was over sixty years of age, tall, broad-shouldered, and firmly built; his hair and beard were of a pure iron grey, and his face, though bronzed and wrinkled, was handsome still. He was dressed in an old suit of nondescript brown, and the brown leggings, which reached to his knees, were covered with bog-mire. He had removed his billycock hat, and the perspiration stood in beads upon his brow. But his face lit up into a bright smile when he looked at me.

"Well, my boy," he said, "sure I am heartily glad to see you, and I hope, now you *have* come, you mean to make a long

stay. Will you join me in a glass of grog? or has Kate given you too much already?"

I confessed that since my arrival I had had nothing, and added hastily that I was not in need of anything; but my uncle was not to be put off.

"Nonsense, my boy!" he exclaimed, "after a journey like that any man would want a glass, so you'll just come down with me. I always take half a glass when I come in from shooting. It keeps out the cold, and gives me an appetite for dinner. You haven't got your coat on? Never mind—this is Liberty Hall!"

So saying, and in spite of my remonstrances, he took me downstairs and marshalled me into a room where two young ladies were sitting, clad in riding-habits, with their round felt riding-hats pushed back on their heads. My uncle introduced the young ladies as "Alley" and "Nora," and disposed of me as their "Cousin Jack." The girls looked up, stared, and laughed,

then they rose, shook hands with me, and made off to dress for dinner. Kenmare turned to the waiting-maid, who was bringing in the cold water for his grog.

"A glass for my nephew, Mary, my dear," he said, "and when you're back in the kitchen tell that spalpeen Shawn to wake himself up a bit, for there's a new master for him at the lodge. Sure he's a lazy loon, but he knows his way about, and I mean him to look after Mr Stedman!"

Then his eye fell upon Kate, who was passing on her way to the dining-room, and he exclaimed,—

"Oh, Kate, Kate, where is all your Irish hospitality?"

"Sure, papa," returned Kate, blushing and laughing, "it is not my fault. He arrived so suddenly; he took us all so much by surprise, that I completely forgot he might be thirsty!"

Having disposed of my grog, I was al-

lowed to go to my room again, receiving this time special orders to dress quickly, for the dinner would not be long.

My first care was to stand before the glass and examine myself critically. As I did so, I called up the imaginary picture which the girls had drawn of me, and understood the startled look of surprise which had come into their eyes, as they had rested the first time upon me.

"Middle-aged, and old-fashioned!" I was certainly neither. I was tall and slim, and despite my thirty years my worst enemy could not have accused me of looking more than twenty-five. Perhaps this last fact was owing to the lack of hair on my face, for beyond a slight moustache which shaded my upper lip, I had none.

Having examined myself, and feeling rather pleased with the result, I turned from the glass and hurried on with my operations for dressing. I had brought a few suits with me, but they had been select-

ed more with a view to sport than ladies' society. True, I had been perfectly aware that I was about to be introduced into the society of half-a-dozen girls, but I had not thought the whole of them worth the carriage of a suit of dress clothes. As I acknowledged this, and remembered how well a suit of dress clothes became me, I continued my dressing in anything but a contented frame of mind.

I had finished, and was about to take another survey of myself in the glass, when a gong sounded loudly. I hastily descended the stairs, crossed the hall, and entered the dining-room.

I was the last to arrive.

There was my uncle, habited now in a suit of dark tweed, with spotless linen, which showed off to perfection his bronzed cheeks and iron-grey hair; and there were the girls, all six of them, looking as fresh as new-blown roses, all nicely dressed in delicate whites and creams and pinks, and

presenting as pretty a picture as one could hope to see on a summer's day.

The only bit of shade was introduced by Kate, and she, being the oldest, and, as it were, the matron of the family, had thought it consistent with her matronly dignity to wear shades of a sombre hue. She was dressed that night in a costume of soft black lace, with slashings of amber, and she carried a couple of pale yellow roses at her throat and in her black hair.

The dinner passed off merrily. We were waited upon by the couple of neat Irish colleens who had carried in my luggage. Both the food and the drink were good. My uncle kept us amused with some good stories; and the girls had learnt the difficult lesson of not to expect a lot of foolish attentions from a man when he's tired and hungry. They talked to their father and to each other; but for the time being they were generous enough to let me alone.

During the dinner I felt grateful enough for their consideration; but after the inner man was refreshed, and when all the girls had retired to the drawing-room, it was another matter. Then I began to long for their society; so, presently seeing that my uncle was growing sleepy over his grog, I proposed that we should "join the ladies." Nothing loath he rose, and we repaired to the drawing-room together.

All the girls were there, and most of them were occupied; but the one who attracted the most of my attention was Amy. She sat on the hearth, just as I had seen her sitting on the door-step, surrounded and almost smothered by that strange collection of dogs. The tiniest mite of the collection, a shaggy little terrier, was curled up in her lap; while the sole desire of the others seemed to be to touch some part of her pretty little body. They rested their heads on her shoulder, they poked their cold noses into her little

hands, they sniffed about her hair, they leisurely licked her brown cheek.

I took my seat with the party, and by dint of a few well-applied questions, managed to make myself tolerably well acquainted with one and all.

Thus I learned that Kate was not only the good fairy at home, but in the village; that she helped the needy and cured the sick, taking very often the place of the doctor, who had a strong liking for whisky, and consequently was not always equal to the demands made upon him. But what did the villagers care? They knew that at the lodge there was a medicine chest as good or better than any in the doctor's surgery; that at any hour, both day and night, Kate was ready to answer the call of the sick; that for the performance of operations which were well within her knowledge, her hand was as sure as the doctor's; and most important of all, that she always

carried a basket well filled with dainties for the patient to eat. Consequently Kate's hands were always pretty full. Sometimes the sick were brought to the lodge and treated in the room known as "Kate's Surgery," but when they were too ill to be removed she went to them.

Aileen and Nora had a passion for riding, and spent a good deal of their time on the backs of a couple of country hacks which their father had given them. In this way they managed to render some valuable assistance to Kate. In the course of a morning's ride they could visit half-a-dozen patients and report progress; they had also a couple of capacious saddle-bags which Kate could fill. Besides this, Aileen was fond of a good day's fishing, and there wasn't a boy in Connaught could beat her at tying a fly.

As for Oona, I found at once she was a dreamer, and lived in a world of her own.

She was fond of roaming about the village alone, of visiting spots made interesting in her eyes by their connection with legends and fairy tales. After having listened with breathless interest to the tales told by the old cauliaghs of the village, she would return to her home to lie in her hammock, and dream. She had also a tiny study at the top of the house, I was told, where she sometimes sat to write out the poems and romances, which she hoped some day to be able to give to the world. When quite a little child, and up to the age of fourteen, she had been a zealous contributor to *Little Folks' Magazine*, and for certain stories published therein she had received a couple of silver medals and a beautifully bound volume of *Æsop's Fables*. I was promised a sight of these treasures, then hidden in the study.

Biddy and Amy, the youngest of this girl-garland, were supposed not to have formed any particular tastes at all. Biddy's

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chief occupation seemed to be to look after her father's fishing tackle and cartridges, while Amy they thought might turn out to be a clever musician, since at the early age of six she had actually composed an Irish jig. When I expressed my amazement that the child should surround herself by all the dogs that chose to hang about the establishment, I was informed that the creatures were Amy's special pride, and that the whole family belonged solely to her, since they had been given to her by friends on her birthdays.

"They discovered somehow that she had a liking for pets," said Kate, "and so as every birthday came round, two or three were sure to arrive. Papa is answerable for it; it was he who first developed her liking for dogs. He gave her Nero when she was only a year old, and he has watched over her ever since. Amy, you ought to introduce Nero to cousin Jack."

"Where is he?" said Amy, looking round; and she called his name.

At first the call produced no result. The little terriers of the family frisked about and wagged their tails, and the white Gordon setter turned his eye sleepily upon Amy and yawned. Upon the call being twice repeated, however, the drawing-room door opened, and there stalked majestically in a handsome, black, curly-coated retriever. He looked neither to the right nor the left, but walked quietly forward to where his little mistress sat, paused before her, and gazed inquiringly into her face. She took his head between her hands, and bestowed two or three fond kisses upon his coal-black nose. He sneezed violently, shook his head, looked very much disgusted, but made no attempt to move. Amy laughed delightedly.

"He *hates* being kissed," she cried; "he can't bear me to love him. Oh, you dear, disagreeable old Nero, go and say 'How do you do?' to cousin Jack!"

He turned his eye towards me; after a moment's hesitation he walked quietly over to where I sat, looked at me critically for a moment, then graciously lifted his paw.

"Shake hands!" screamed Amy enthusiastically. "Sure you must shake hands at once, for it's a sign he likes you. Papa, papa, just look at Nero giving a welcome to cousin Jack!"

"He's a nice dog, isn't he?" said Kate, when the ceremony of shaking hands was over; "and he is a good dog too. He once saved Amy's life!"

"Indeed!"

"Yes; about two years ago the nurse, unknown to me, took Amy and Nero with her and went out for a sail on the sea. A squall capsized the boat not far from land; both the nurse and the boy who was sailing the boat were drowned, but old Nero swam to shore with Amy in his mouth."

"By Jove!" I cried; "he's a fine fellow!"

"And, will you believe it, ever since that day he has never allowed her to go out without him. If she attempted to shut him up he'd tear the house down. One day he was shut in Oona's room for safety. Amy had gone with some of the girls to a wedding in Father John's chapel on the other side of the Ferry. In the middle of the ceremony the company were startled by the sudden appearance of Nero, — dripping from his swim across the estuary, and with a cut and bleeding nose. He had broken the glass and leapt out of the window, and tracked her there!"

I turned to Nero, who still stood looking critically at me. He answered my look by leisurely wagging his tail. I patted his head approvingly, and I certainly felt glad that he should have deemed it worth his while to give me a special welcome to Ballyshanrany.

CHAPTER IV.

IT is now four weeks since I arrived at Storport, and already the old life in London seems like a half-forgotten dream. Jack Briefless is transformed into Jack Viator. I am a full-blossomed sportsman, fisherman, boatsman; in fact, a regular Connaught man. I can drink whisky neat, and I have learned to love the taste of potheen. I know almost every man, woman, and child in the place. I have gone salmon-fishing with the clergyman, and coursing with the priest. Over and above all

this, is my Sultan-like position in the house. The girls adore me, and I adore the girls.

As to my uncle, he is the prince of good fellows. His horses, his dogs, his carriages, his daughters, and his servants are all at my disposal. But no one bothers me. I come and go just as I please. Every day I can make my own programme. If I want to go shooting, dogs and guns are ready. If I prefer to stay at home loafing, the girls have a thousand devices to amuse me. It is a lazy life and a merry; my only fear is that it will utterly spoil me for civilisation.

The good fairies of the lodge have given me an attendant Gnome, who is at my beck and call whenever I choose to rub the magic ring if I fancy, and summon him to wait upon me.

His name is Shawn na Chauliagh, or John of the Ferry, so called because he is one of the large family reared by the

ferryman who plays Charon between Storport and the neighbouring islands. He stands six feet high in his brogues, has hair of wondrous redness, and a face stained mahogany-brown with wind and weather; is twenty-five years old; can tie a fly and cast a line; can walk from the lodge door to the highest mountain without pausing for breath; knows every corner of the moors and every pool of the waters, and is a prime favourite with both the gentry and the tenantry. The district is proclaimed, and is entirely given over to the landlord shooters; but wherever I go I know I am safe with Shawn.

Two or three mornings after my arrival, my attendant spirit made his first appearance.

I was standing at the lodge-door with my uncle, preparatory to mounting the car and being driven over to the Owennuff (ten miles off) for a day's fishing,

when there appeared before us a tall, powerful figure with a fishing-basket on his back, a staff in his hand, thick brogues, tattered trousers rolled up to the knee, showing a bare pair of herculean legs.

"Shawn, ye rogue," said my uncle, "are you ready?"

"I am, yer honor," replied the giant.

"Have you the lunch in your basket, and the whisky?"

"Yes, your honor."

"This is my nephew, Mr Jack. So long as he remains here he's your master, remember;—you'll take good care of him and show him the best sport in the country. Do you mind, now?"

Shawn smiled and nodded, and then, in Connaught fashion, held out his hand, which I took and pressed. At that moment the car came round. I jumped up by the driver in front, Shawn mounted behind, and away we drove, while my uncle

cried "good luck" to us, and waved his hat from the house-door.

Shawn was very reticent that day. I fell a little in his estimation when, by terrible bungling, I lost my first salmon. But he soon made up his mind that I, although nominally his master, was a sort of a helpless lunatic, to whom he was to act as a temporary keeper and protector. When I hesitated about crossing from one part of the river to another, he quietly took me on his back, and strode across with me, wading waist deep. He showed me how to throw a fly properly, and when my arms grew tired, which they did very quickly, he took the rod and fished the waters leisurely himself.

His opinion of me sank for a moment when he saw me dilute my whisky with water, but it rose again rapidly when he found that I drank very little of the spirit, and gave him as his portion more than two-thirds of my uncle's large flask.

From that day forward we became firm friends and allies.

Some of Shawn's sayings and doings are memorable for their oddity. The other day, as we were trudging over the moor in search of the snipe, which were just beginning to arrive, driven hither by the first white frost, we saw, quietly contemplating us from an adjacent knoll, the head of a donkey.

The sight encouraged me to a foolish joke.

"Look there, Shawn!" I exclaimed, "isn't that the *Diaoul?*"

The Diaoul is Connaught for the name of his Satanic Majesty. Shawn did not smile; indeed, his countenance seldom or never relaxed from its friendly solemnity, but with the quiet yet respectful air of superior knowledge peculiar to him, he proceeded to correct me.

"Indeed then, your honor," he replied, "it is *not!*"

Then, meeting my look of inquiry, he calmly continued,—

"Sure there are two things the *Diaoul* can never put hisself into. It's aisy enough for the *Diaoul* to put hisself into a sheep, or a dog, or a bull, or a sealgh, or a crane, or a wild goose, your honor; but sorra a man living ever saw him like a donkey, or like a pig!"

We walked slowly on; after a few minutes Shawn observed thoughtfully,—

"They're saying, your honor, that pigs can *see the wind!*"

"Indeed!" I exclaimed.

"And that it's of a *red* colour!"

"Is that so, Shawn?" I exclaimed, laughing; "then, if only pigs are gifted enough to perceive it, one of them must have been your authority."

Shawn didn't seem to understand me, but strode on in a dark reverie, surprised that I should treat so solemn a subject with anything like levity.

It would be in vain to deny the fact that Shawn's weakness is a love for distilled

spirits, and I am afraid that my companionship has not helped to reform him. This reminds me that my cousin Kathleen, who is a zealous abstainer, and does a good deal of teetotal work in the village, has been trying for a long time to get Shawn to sign the pledge ;—just before my arrival she almost succeeded.

After having disappeared for two or three days, and returned with all the signs upon him of a heavy carouse, Shawn appeared, penitent and crestfallen, at the lodge. He was no longer refractory ; he was quite ready to sign the pledge. Delighted at this conversion, Kate led him into the little parlour which she used as housekeeper's room, produced pen and ink, and the usual teetotal card for Shawn's signature.

"I'm so glad, Shawn," she said, "that you mean to reform. Drinking is so wicked, so very wicked!"

"Indeed, then, Miss Kathleen, it *is!*"

"And when you've made up your mind

to give it up altogether, you'll be so much happier in your mind!"

"Indeed, then, Miss Kathleen, that's true!"

"Put your mark there, where I have put your name,—John O'Donnell!"

Shawn hesitated a moment, scratching his head, then took the pen, and with infinite trouble, holding his head sideways, and lolling out his tongue like a school-boy, contrived to make his mark; the mark made, he looked at it proudly, then turning to his young mistress with a smile which was a strange compound of shyness, simplicity, and self-satisfaction, he exclaimed,—

"And *now*, Miss Kathleen, you'll shust fetch out the bottle, *and give me one glass!*"

Even after that exhibition of Shawn's complicated perception of the nature of an oath, my cousin did not let him escape her. She lectured him soundly, and at last convinced him that he stood pledged not to touch a drop of anything, unless (here, alas!

Kate added a fatal corollary) he was dangerously ill, and absolutely needed the spirit as a medicine.

The next day Shawn was taken alarmingly bad "with the colic," and messengers came flying up to the lodge to beg a "little drop of whisky, for the love of God." My uncle, who was at home alone, sent down the physic. From that day forth, until Kathleen indignantly released him from his promise, Shawn's health was a subject of considerable alarm to his relatives, his internal attacks occurring with strange frequency, and yielding to no medicine but one.

So much for Shawn's addiction to the bottle. While admitting his infirmity, I must do him the justice to say that I have never seen him drunk, or stupidly intoxicated; it would take a large quantity, indeed, to affect his seasoned carcase!

And let me admit, moreover, that he is no worse than his betters. Everybody loves

whisky in this district. My own uncle can take his glass freely. His neighbours and his servants are free drinkers. The priest, Father John Murphy, would have been a bishop long ago (I have it on his own authority) but for the bottle, and his curate, Father Tim Doolan, has twice been suspended. The doctor, an M.D. of Dublin, is seldom or never sober.

This reminds me that shortly after my arrival I heard great accounts of the priest's conversational powers and the doctor's joviality. "They were characters," my uncle said, "to be studied and enjoyed," and he told me a dozen merry stories concerning them.

They called one morning together, and sadly disappointed me, for neither had a word to say for himself. Father John, a powerfully-built man of five-and-forty, with a coal-black coat and a rubicund complexion, was the picture of melancholy. Doctor Maguire, a little, round man, with bristling

black hair, dressed in a rough tweed suit, and carrying a heavy walking-stick, looked fit for a funeral.

No sooner were they seated in the parlour than my uncle brought out the bottle and glasses.

"Not for me, Mr Kenmare," said Maguire gloomily; "I'm not tasting." And he explained that he had taken the pledge for a month.

My uncle turned to Father John, who put up his hand and shook his head.

"Nor myself neither!" he exclaimed. "It's the bishop has made me promise not to take a glass till next confirmation."

My uncle did not press them, but put the materials down upon the table midway between them. Then I, to whom they had just been introduced, tried to draw them into conversation. Impossible. They sat like martyred men, lugubrious, monosyllabic. Where were their jovial ways, their jests, their wreathed smiles?

Gone; and as for the country, the weather, the people, they hadn't a good word to say of any of them. It was a miserable world.

Presently my uncle was called out of the room by one of the girls. Slightly embarrassed by my strange company, I walked over to the window and looked out. Then I heard the following conversation carried on by the two worthies, whom, slightly turning, I watched out of the corner of my eye:—

"Father John, sir, you're looking mighty pale!"

"No paler than yourself, doctor; I'm grieved to see *you* looking so bad."

A pause. Each fidgeted, and cast a sly glance at the bottle.

"Is it the green sickness that's on ye, doctor? Holy saints, take care of your health!"

"It's a bad cold I have got, Father John. But look after yourself, for I'm in dread the fever is coming on ye!"

"What's good for that, doctor?"

"A glass of Jamieson, or maybe two glasses."

"And for your own green sickness, doctor? I'm asking ye as ye're a medical man!"

"There's no cure but one, and sure I have taken the pledge, and can't taste."

Another pause. The men looked sadly at one another, and then at the bottle.

"Father John," said Maguire suddenly, "as your medical adviser, sir, I insist on your taking a glass of Jamieson!"

"Dr Maguire," cried the other, "I'll not have your death on me conscience! Take a drop of the creature to cure your sickness, and, by all the saints, I'll *absolve* you!"

Almost simultaneously their hands were stretched out towards the bottle. The priest's hand seized it first, and poured out two brimming measures. Each clutched a glass, and lifted it to his thirsty lips.

At that moment my uncle re-entered the room, and roared with laughter at the picture. Both men joined in the merriment. Almost instantaneously they were transformed. Jest, story, and song flowed from their magically-loosened lips. Before they left the room, Father John had sung "The Vale of Avoca" in the richest Irish; and Dr Maguire had given his famous description of how the piper of Achill was anointed, waked, and half buried when he was lying unconscious, not dead, but *dead drunk*, after Andy O'Shaughnessy's wedding!

Such are two of the leading worthies of the place. There are others to whom I shall endeavour to introduce my reader in due course; but these two are paramount. Both, I may observe in passing, have strong popular sympathies. Father John, at his second bottle, is easily persuaded to denounce the Saxon—in other words, he stands erect, and with many sawings of his right

arm, thunders out a bloodthirsty poem contributed some years ago to the *Nation*. Maguire, at the same stage, sings, "Rory of the Hills," and other Fenian ditties, with tremendous unction. Both mean no harm; neither would hurt a fly, I am sure of that. They do these things in what may be called, referring to a certain famous discussion, a "Pickwickian spirit,"—it is a part of their profession, a phase of their local humour.

It is very curious to me to dwell in a district so disaffected, and to see everything so tranquil and so pleasant.

When I came over I brought a revolver with me, thinking I carried my life in my hand, but my uncle and the girls laughed outright at my fears. Yet not a mile from their door this summer, Mr Freeland, a Scotch farmer, was shot down dead in cold blood close to the church-door; and in the thick of the fair at Westport I had pointed out to me the actual murderer of Lord Antrim. Nay, am I not on the most inti-

mate terms with Conolly Magrath, who has the worst reputation in the whole place.

Conolly is a little, mild-spoken man, with pale blue eyes, a watery mouth, and the most amiable of tempers. To look at him, you would take him for a lamb in human form. He attends to my uncle's horses, and accompanies us sometimes on boating excursions, adores the "young mistresses," as he calls them, and worships my uncle, who has more than once got him out of serious trouble.

"They tell me, Conolly," I said to him one morning, "that you know who shot Mr Freeland?"

Conolly, who was busily rubbing up some old harness, smiled, a smile that was child-like and bland.

"Is it me, your honor? Now, who would be after telling you that same?"

"Never mind who told me; but come now, you do know something about it; don't you?"

"Sorra haporth, yer honor!" he replied, still smiling.

"Well, now, didn't you threaten Mr O'Niel of the Castle, your own landlord?"

"I did *not*, then!" was the reply; he added naïvely, "I only told him the truth. I said that if he asked for the rent this year, maybe the boys would be firing a shot or two at him, for fun to themselves!"

I looked at him with grave indignation.

"It's a shocking state of things!" I cried; "a disgrace to Ireland. Scarcely a day passes but some new outrage is reported!"

"I'm in dread, your honor," returned Conolly, "that it'll never stop till the boys get hold of the land their own selves!"

"And pay no rent? ridiculous!"

"Sure, how can the poor creatures pay rent, when they've sorra penny in the world?"

I fixed my eyes upon him.

"Don't you think God would punish you," I said, "if you took away a precious human life?"

Conolly was not smiling now; his pale face had turned a trifle whiter, and there was a curious working about his lips.

"I'd never do that same, your honor!"

"I'm glad to hear you say so. *You'd* never commit murder, I am sure!"

"Is it me, your honor? But I put it to your own self, what harm would there be for a poor boy to *kill a tyrant?*"

"Why, that *is* murder!" I exclaimed.

"Is it, then, your honor?" he replied, smilingly. "Sure, then, they don't call *that* murder down here in Connaught."

To this day I can't quite make out whether Conolly is a rogue or simpleton. I am less decided in my opinion concerning his blood relation and great factotum, Mrs Jack Timlin, who kept the village inn.

"Sure there's only one man in my parish," said Father John one day, "and

he's a woman," referring to this same Mrs Timlin. This extraordinary person, the widow of the late lamented Jack Timlin, who got wounded in the head in the Westport riots, has more influence in the district than any other individual, rich or poor. She is said to be the head of the Ribbon conspiracy hereabouts, and it is asserted that every dark crime which has been perpetrated in the neighbourhood, had been sealed and covenanted in her little parlour.

Physically, she is a tall, lean woman, with a sickly complexion, induced partly by her habit of smoking strong tobacco. She has large, bold eyes, an impudent expression, and a determined jaw. She dresses very shabbily, much like the poor people hereabouts, but wears in addition to the usual short gown and petticoat, a large widow's cap cocked somewhat rakishly on the top of her unkept black hair. She is said to be rich—at all events she lends money at high interest to the country people, and woe to

the man or woman, however poor, who fails to keep faith with *her* in the repayment of instalments.

Mrs Jack Timlin, though a furious Land Leaguer, would sell up and demolish Mr Parnell himself if he owed her a penny.

She is at once the terror and admiration of the district. On principle she had seldom or never paid any rent, and the landlord never thought of turning her out of her hostelry till some months ago, when, indignant and desperate, he gave her warning to quit. Being of a careful turn of mind, she at once insured the place, with all its furniture and stock, for a heavy sum. A few weeks after the insurance was effected the place was burned to the ground. It appeared on inquiry that a stupid caretaker, whom the widow had left in charge of the place while she visited some friends in Westport, had one night gone to bed in his clothes with a lighted pipe in his mouth, and awakening found the room in flames.

He had then rushed out, and sat down quietly on the opposite side of the road, where the police had found him at daybreak, contemplating the blackened walls. Questioned by the constable as to why he had failed to give the alarm, he had protested he hadn't dared, for the life of him, to leave the spot,—the widow Timlin having sworn him solemnly, before she left, to "*keep his eye upon the house;*" which he had done accordingly, to his own perfect satisfaction, and it is recorded that of the widow.

These are some of the worthies of the village; as for the village itself, and its situation, I find I have said little or nothing about them. Words are of little use to call up natural scenery; so a few rough lines of description must serve for a picture of what could only be properly reproduced by pencil or brush.

The small cluster of huts which bears the dignified title of "The Village," stands upon a grassy hillock, about two hundred

yards from the sea-shore. A magnificent range of hills runs for miles inland and almost entirely surrounds it. In the far distance stretching out into the sea, and partly cutting off the sweep of the open ocean, is Erris Head.

A sandy bar, formed by the incessant washing of the sea upon the soft sand, stretches from the cliffs on either side, and forms a sort of breakwater, keeping the little bay within in a state of comparative calm ; and so effectual is it, that even in the roughest winter weather, when outside the rollers and breakers are raging wildly, and the spray is dashing about the rocks and over the summits of the cliffs, the bay within is comparatively still, and one may use a small boat with perfect safety. It is impossible, however, to cross the bar until the waves have entirely subsided and sunk into a partial calm.

There are two estuaries, one on either side of the village, which extend for miles

inland, winding and turning among the hills. At high tide they swell into magnificent fjords or arms of the sea, but at low water they sink into insignificant stretches of mud and rivulet, and sometimes, especially during the low spring tides, it is possible to walk across the strand dry shod.

Shawn's father is the ferryman—that is to to say, he is the ferryman so called, but his duties are done by all the members of his numerous family, including any number of shock-headed gorsoons and black-eyed colleens, of all sizes and ages, and in all sorts of costumes.

The ferryboat is an enormous structure, generally out of repair. When any one wants to come or go across, there is no hurry. I have seen the priest myself gesticulating for a whole hour on the opposite side of the estuary, without making the slightest impression on the ferry family, who were tranquilly digging in the potato fields close by.

The ferry is, of course, a shebeen, and potheen flows there like water. Sometimes the whole family get drunk together, and go to bed for the day.

One of Shawn's brothers, "a little shmall boy" of twenty, big as a grenadier, carries the letters. He generally takes his own time about delivering them, and they have been known to arrive in an advanced stage of decomposition. If anything were needed to prove that we are quite outside the pale of civilisation here in Connaught, it would be the charmingly informal method of the postal delivery.

CHAPTER V.

"JACK, my boy," said my uncle one evening, "be ready at ten to-morrow for a sail up to Glenamoy. Charlie Bingley and Achill Murray are coming over from the castle, and we mean to have a pleasant day, please God."

So it was settled; and while we were seated next morning at breakfast, young Bingley, in the kilt, and Murray, in a knickerbocker suit, looked in—the former a lanky hobbledehoy, much given to dark musings on the reluctant growth of his own whiskers; the latter a square-set, jolly

fellow of five-and-thirty, and despite his Scotch extraction, one of the most popular men in the district. Mrs Bingley of the castle possessed large salmon fisheries, Murray was her overseer, and Charlie her hopeful son and heir.

Breakfast over we strolled out to the "Yawl," which we found waiting for us, manned by four sturdy rowers—Shawn, two of his big brothers, and Conolly Magrath. Rugs were spread in the stern, and others in the bow, to sit or lie on, and there were cheerful glimpses of bottles and capacious luncheon baskets.

My uncle carried his rifle; I had my new Holland choke bore, and Bingley was content with a muzzle-loader, an old Joe Manton.

Three of the girls, Kathleen, Aileen, and Oona were of the party, and all were in the best of spirits. I had almost forgotten to mention Nero, Amy's retriever, which she lent to us for the day.

We set out early in the forenoon—and such a forenoon! The sky was bright as gold; the heathery mountains rose purple clear on either side, with every mossy boulder, each snowy torrent imaged clearly in the crystal water. "Not a feature of the hills was in the mirror slighted." To our right, as we rowed up the broad fjord, rose the hills of Ennis—green slopes undulating to peaks of rock and crests of heather; to our left stretched the lower range of the islands of Moira, on which the sea-clouds rest in stormy weather, but which were now dark and rugged in the blinding sunlight. Before us, on the fjord itself, rose bright green isles and emerald promontories, with nothing living, save an occasional flight of wild duck, to disturb the tranquil scene.

My uncle sat in the stern, helm in hand. On his right sat Aileen and Murray; on his left Kathleen, Oona, and myself. Young Bingley had taken his position in the bow

keenly expectant of a shot at something flying.

Presently we left the village far behind, and came among the innumerable small islands which dot the fjord. On every promontory sat a heron, patiently watching the water, and rising leisurely out of gunshot as we approached.

"Look out, Charlie," cried Murray suddenly. "There's a duck!"

And, indeed, one of the canard species was approaching at lightning speed, high up in the air. Without turning in his flight he passed right over us.

Bang! bang! went Charlie's gun. Bang! bang! went off mine.

"Sure, she's far out of range," said my uncle quietly, which was certainly the case.

"We'll land on Mackinroy," continued my uncle. "A pack of grouse breeds there every year, and the dog will be sure to put them up."

The island to which he alluded was right before us—a low-lying, damp piece of land, with some clumps of rugged heather. We ran the boat into a creek. Young Bingley jumped out, and I followed with the dog.

"Won't you come, Achill?" said Charlie to his friend.

"No; I'll stay here with the girls," answered Murray, laughingly.

We climbed the shore, and came out upon as wet and ugly a flat as could be found even in Ireland. We soon discovered that Murray was wise in not accompanying us, for the very first step we took inland, we found ourselves wading knee deep, and Nero, who raced on a little in advance of us, splashed up the water as he ran. It certainly did not seem a likely place for grouse, but there were one or two dry knölls of heather where a bird or two might be discovered.

Suddenly, just as I floundered into a bog-hole, a big hare got up at my very feet; I

was too flurried to fire, and Bingley rolled him over.

"Well fired, your honor!" cried a voice behind us, and Conolly, running up, appropriated pussy.

Wheet, wheet! up got a snipe, and went away zigzag before us; we both fired, and missed.

"Never mind," cried Conolly "you've given him a fright, anyway!"

Presently the dog, who had been scampering somewhat aimlessly, began to "draw" in a straight line forward. We followed him as fast as the wet ground would permit us, and soon saw, running swiftly before us, a number of brown birds with their wings trailing and their heads low down. But the retriever rushed in wildly, and up got, out of range, six grouse, headed by the old cock.

They did not fly far, however, and we marked them as they alighted among deep heather five hundred yards away. Conolly

held up the dog, and we walked to the spot. The birds lay like stones. We walked all over the place, and were just going to loosen the dog, when the old cock rose, and fell immediately to my gun. Then three of the pack got up together, and we secured a brace; and finally, with the aid of Nero, we accounted for two more.

We walked leisurely on, and for some time discovered nothing more, save several snipe, which got up out of range. Suddenly Conolly, who was walking some distance to our right, crouched down, and began running towards us at full speed.

"What is it?" I cried, as he came up panting.

He explained rapidly that, peeping over at the adjoining shore, he had caught a glimpse of a number of ducks swimming close to the water's edge. By walking over at a point indicated by his finger, we were certain to get a shot.

Away we went, stumbling and splashing. We reached a dark knoll overlooking the shore, and surmounted it, ready to fire, but we saw nothing; and while we were gazing down vacantly—whirr! whirr! quack! quack! up got a dozen mallard from right under us. We fired all four barrels, and dropped two birds on the very edge of the sea; while another, after flying some distance, fell like a stone into the water, and floated dead.

"After him, honey!" cried Conolly; and away went Nero, beating the crystal tide. He soon returned with the bird in his mouth.

Flushed and victorious, we now went back to the yawl. After all, we had the laugh at Murray, who had missed some capital sport, but he was very busy with Aileen, and didn't seem to care.

To reward our prowess, my uncle served out glasses all round, and then we rowed away again upon the water.

There is nothing like whisky to warm

a boatman's heart, and soon the rowers were chattering together in Irish. My uncle pricked up his ears, for he spoke the lingo like a native.

"What's that about, Mr O'Neil?" he asked sharply, addressing Conolly.

Conolly smiled his childlike Chineeish smile.

"Nothing, your honor," he replied; "only the poor creature has got protection. He's six peelers to guard him,—two in the kitchen, two in the parlour, and two at the gate, and sorra drop or nip can he take without them to watch over him!"

"Nonsense; there's only one policeman up at the castle!"

"Only one, is it!" exclaimed Conolly in mock surprise. "Sure that is a small attendance for so mighty a man!"

At this sally the other boatsmen were convulsed—Shawn almost "catching a crab" in the height of his merriment.

"Ah, you're a bad lot," cried my uncle; "O'Neil's too good for Connaught!"

"Too good, your honor!" replied Conolly; "well, then, if that's so, sorra one will mind when he goes to a better place!"

"You want *me* for a landlord," said my uncle, shaking his fist.

"Troth then, we do; more power to ye! It's not the likes of *you* that could be turning poor boys out of house and home!"

"I'd have my rents out of you, and if you didn't pay, I'd evict the whole of you! What do you think of that, now?"

It was very easy to see what they thought of it, for my uncle's good nature and generosity were notorious. They heeded his high words no more than the idle wind. Hadn't he stood up for the boys again and again, when it was a question between rich and poor!

"O'Neil's a poor-spirited man," said my uncle in an aside to me; "he doesn't

understand the people, and I'm afraid he'll get into trouble."

We were now in the narrows, and far away to our right we could see the highway. All at once, Conolly uttered an exclamation.

"Look, it's himself!"

In the far distance, trotting slowly along the road, was a dog-cart. A grey-haired gentleman in an ulster was driving, with a groom seated at his side, and two armed policemen behind him. They went very leisurely, and whenever they approached any turn in the road, or other "coign of vantage," the groom peeped nervously forward, holding something in his hand.

Conolly rested on his oar, convulsed with silent laughter.

"See to Sam the Sassenach, now," he said. "He's got the master's big pistol; but he's in dread of his life."

"Sam the Sassenach," so called by the tenantry, was Mr O'Neil's English groom,

a fat and timorous importation from Belgravia, who looked upon the Irish as barbarians, and without an "h" to bless himself with, held them and their language in the utmost contempt.

"Oh, mille murther," said Conolly, "if your honor would only lend me the gun, I would like to have a shot at the *bouchal* —bad cess to him!"

"Silence, you scoundrel!" thundered my uncle; "how dare you talk like that?"

"Sure, it's too far off for him to be hurted!" pleaded Conolly. "But if he only heard the ghost of the sound, he'd be off, like my mother's lame gander, screeching wid the fright."

The road pursued by the dog-cart wound through the lonely waste; and in the loneliest part of all, on the wayside, stood an iron police hut, where there was a detachment of police day and night. Close to the hut the dog-cart stopped, and several

black figures ran over and stood talking with Mr O'Neil.

It was curious to watch the change of expression in the boatmen's faces as they looked at the distant group. Their brows were knit, their teeth set, their whole look was indescribably sinister and forbidding.

"Away with ye!" cried my uncle, and with one last scowl of hatred and disdain, they bent themselves to their oars.

It was now scorching hot, and the windless waters of the fjord flashed back the splendours of the sun, like a golden mirror, on which our boat was crawling, like a fly. The hills on every side of us, the reflections of the hills under us, were netted in a throbbing haze of light.

It was hard work rowing in such a blaze, and soon the men leant on their oars, panting and perspiring. My uncle looked at his watch; it was two o'clock.

"Where shall we lunch, girls?" he said.

The girls did not know. There were a thousand bright places round about, and one was as good as another.

"Try Eilian na Sealgh, your honor," suggested Conolly. "There it lies before ye, wid a strip of white sand and a stream of fresh water, and besides that, there's a chance at the seals on the rocks."

We had only to glance at the island, lying green and sunny, right before us, with the "strip of white sand" shining like gold; and Conolly's suggestion was carried *nem con.*

There was a mile to row; but with the prospect of rest and whisky before them, the men pulled like galley slaves escaping for life. Before long we ran in on the golden sand, Conolly and Shawn jumped in knee-deep, and carried us out one by one, with guns, luncheon, baskets, rugs, and other paraphernalia.

Oh that golden beach of Eilian na Sealgh!

Oh the tiny rivulet running silvern down

the mossy rocks, and trickling down in innumerable diamonds and rubies to the cool white fringe of the sea!

Oh the lichened rocks, scattered here and there, making dark shades for coolness, the silvery sand as dry as gold dust, which when you lifted it in your hand you found to be full of countless tiny shells, glittering with all the colours of the prism!

Did my reader, who has doubtless picnicked many a time on some green bank or scented lawn on the banks of the Thames, or on some heathery knoll in the Highlands, ever find such an oasis as I am trying to describe? If so, his lines have indeed been cast, as mine were, in pleasant places! When Aileen, with Murray's assistance, had spread the snowy cloth on the sands; when Oona had laid out the silver luncheon service, knives, forks, and glasses; and when Kathleen had produced the contents of her baskets,—cold patés, grouse pies, fowl and ham, enough to provision a garri-

son for a week, with sherry and whisky for the men, and a bottle of champagne for the girls,—who would have thought that we were banqueting in hapless Ireland, with Land Leaguers and landlord shooters for attendant spirits ?

While Conolly and the boatmen withdrew to a little distance and threw themselves down in the shelter of the rocks, waiting for their turn to come, we feasted royally, and discovered before long that the girls, who understood Irish appetites, had not made such unnecessary provision after all.

Then, fished out of the basket by Kathleen's deft hand, and received with a shout of acclamation, came some of my uncle's choicest cigars, which were merrily handed round.

"And now," said my uncle, "let the boys have their turn ; while they're feeding we'll have a turn round the island, and maybe a shot at a seal !"

So we rose and scattered, while Kathleen and Oona signalled to the men.

"Don't leave them too much whisky, darlings," said my uncle as he started off, "or we'll never get home to-night!"

The girls laughed and nodded, while we lifted up our guns and prepared to inspect the island.

Somehow or other—was it by accident or of set purpose, I wonder—we separated on our tour of inspection. My uncle strolled off with Bingley and Kathleen, Murray disappeared with Aileen, and I, ten minutes after lunch was over, found myself wandering among the sweet-smelling heather with Oona by my side!

That must bring the record of my day's adventure to a conclusion. What took place afterwards is *not* to be put on paper! As for sporting after that ramble with Oona, it was out of the question. The rest of the day's sailing seemed like a dream. I was dimly conscious of the sun setting and the

moon beginning to rise: of the silvern radiance lighting bay and creek, and leaving the hills in ink-black shadow: of the phosphorescent water splashing from the boatsmen's oars, while Conolly, well warmed with whisky, crooned ballads about the "Green Shamrock," and "Rory of the Hills." All I cared for was the touch of a little hand and the smile of a gentle face. At last, as the boat grated on the shingle, and we prepared to alight close to home, my uncle clapped me on the shoulder.

"Jack, my boy, wake up," he said merrily; "you've been wool-gathering all the day!"

CHAPTER VI.

WE were all very tired after that day's outing, and made a singularly quiet party in the drawing-room after dinner. My uncle indeed had fallen back in his chair in a sound sleep. I was feeling very much as if I should soon follow his example, when a voice in my ear aroused me.

"Cousin Jack," it said, "I believe I saw you nodding! Sure, now, if you sleep all the evening you'll spoil your night's rest, so come and see my study!"

I opened my eyes. I rose with alacrity, for I had recognised the voice as Oona's,

and when that voice spoke, trust me to follow! Besides, the study of which I had heard so much, and seen absolutely nothing, contained certain treasures at which I longed to have a peep. Once or twice already I had expressed my desire to make my way up to the hallowed spot, but my entreaties had always been without avail. There was some work going on there which I must not disturb, some precious papers lying about which I must not examine. When Oona was out, the door of the virgin sanctuary was securely locked, and the key placed in her pocket; when she was in, she was mostly locked in all alone.

But times were changed; the precious work was either finished or destroyed, and the room was open.

"Patience has at length reaped its reward," I said to myself as I followed Oona upstairs, and found myself at last standing in the middle of the chamber.

It was just such a room as I should have imagined my dreamy cousin to have; it was daintily fitted up, and contained such a profusion of first-class writing materials as showed me at once that she was by no means an established litterateur. Go into the study of a literary blue-stocking, pure and simple, and you will find scarcely one pen fit to write with, scarcely a bit of decent paper on which to scribble your name; but Oona had everything of the best, a perfect profusion of pens, ink, and papers, two large waste-paper baskets crammed full to overflowing, a nice collection of books, and two pretty reading-lamps for burning the midnight oil.

I examined the room, and praised it. I endeavoured to be duly impressed by the silver medals and the handsome volume of fables which Oona had received as a child.

Then I asked for the manuscripts, which, I must confess, aroused my curiosity. But they were not forthcoming. Instead, I

was told to sit down and be patient, as Oona wanted to *talk* to me.

Nothing loth, I threw myself into an easy-chair, and waited.

"Cousin Jack," she began, taking a chair in front of me, and looking seriously into my face, "I have written a story."

"So I should have guessed," I returned, glancing at the profusion of writing materials which filled the room.

"No; but I mean a long story, a good story, a story that really ought to be *published.*"

"My dear," I returned, laughing, "most authors think the same; if they didn't, there wouldn't be quite so much trash given to the world."

But Oona was in no joking mood. To my utter amazement, I saw her pale cheek flush, her lovely eyes fill with tears. She rose, and would have left the room, but I stopped her.

"Oona!" I cried in amazement, "what's the matter?"

"Nothing," was the curt reply.

"But there is," I persisted; "you are offended at my silly joke, and you want to quarrel with me, but I'm not going to allow it. I'll apologise. I'll do anything you like to show I'm sorry; but if you persist in hardening your heart against me, I'll not stop another hour in Storport."

As I spoke the last words, I saw ever so slight a shadow pass over her face; her lip quivered, and the large tears that had gathered in her eyes began to fall; the next moment she was actually sobbing on my shoulder.

I tried to soothe her, but I must confess I was by no means displeased at these curious changes in her temperament. I folded my arms about her and caressed her forehead like—like a father; and as she lay sobbing in my arms, with her lovely face hidden on my shoulder, I discovered what, but for

this little incident, might have remained a secret for some time longer. During these few weeks of lazy enjoyment, while I had been studying the Connaught peasants and lounging about the Connaught bogs, I had fallen very deeply in love with the prettiest girl in the district.

I stood like one in a dream, spell-bound with delight. How long I remained thus I don't know—time stood still for me, and my head whirled round. But suddenly I became conscious that her sobs had ceased, that she withdrew herself from my embrace, raised for a moment her blushing face to mine, and then turned to leave the room.

But again I stopped her.

"Come," I said, "tell me we are friends."

She did not answer, but she hung her head, as if to hide her tear-stained face, and held forth her hand. I took it in both of mine, and drew her towards me. At first she resisted, then she allowed me to press her to my breast and kiss her. No words

were spoken, but I felt she understood, and I knew that she loved me.

She begged for a few minutes' leave of absence to bathe her tear-stained cheeks, and I let her go; when she returned I thought her looking more charming than she had ever been before. There was a magical light in her eyes, a fine flush on her cheek, and a winning smile upon her pretty lips, which I tried to persuade myself had not been there before. She laughed, too, with a sort of hysterical gladness; there was a tremor in her voice, and I could not get her to look straight at me, but when I drew my chair close to the one in which she sat, and took her hand in mine, she did not draw it away.

I had forgotten all about the story, but Oona had not; to my amazement she took up the subject, which had almost caused us to quarrel, in nervous haste.

"Cousin Jack," she said, "don't you really want to hear about my story?"

"Of course I do," I returned. "I have been waiting all this time to hear about it. But Oona, why not call me 'Jack,' without the 'cousin'?"

"You would like it better?"

"Much better."

"Very well, then; if you will listen patiently I will try."

I was perfectly willing to listen so long as I could keep my seat by her side, and hold her warm little hand in mine. So as we sat thus, Oona told me about the story —that wonderful story upon which all her hopes of future greatness were evidently based. The narrative, she said, was true —that is to say, it was an exact record of events which had actually taken place at Kildare Castle some half a century ago. Kildare, she proceeded to explain, was a most romantic spot, situated about twelve Irish miles from Storport. Oona, attended by either Conolly or Shawn, had ridden thither again and again, was well acquainted

with the old cauliagh who lived in the keep and had charge of the ruin; consequently she had been shown over it, not once but many times, had inspected every relic extant, and had heard the history of a wildly improbable and most unfortunate love affair which had happened to the Ross family that very generation.

"It is this story," continued Oona, "which I have written in my own way, and which I want you to read. But sit still; I'll get you the manuscript presently. I have something more to tell you first."

"Go on, my darling; I am all attention."

"Well, before you came—that is to say, when you wrote to say that you would come—we girls got much more interested in you than we had been before, and we talked a great deal about you. After a good many discussions we settled in our minds what you must be like, and then as we had promised papa to do our best to amuse you, we began to consider how we could best keep

our promise. But now we all disagreed: one thought you would like one thing, and one another, and we began to despair of coming to any conclusion, when Kathleen suggested a plan which we all agreed to. She said that, as we had so many ideas of amusing you, you ought to get the benefit of them all; that we ought each to take a day, to be called by the name of the one who chose it, and during that day the girl whose name it bore would undertake all the arrangements; that, at the end of the visit, you were to be made to say which day you had enjoyed the most — Kathleen's day, Aileen's day, Nora's day, my day, Biddy's day, or Amy's day. Well, what do you think of it?"

"What do I think of it? Why, I think it's far and away the best thing I've heard since I came to Storport. But I can't make out why I was never told of it before."

"Why," said Oona, looking at me from

head to foot, and giving her half shy smile, "you would have heard of it soon enough if you had been stout and middle-aged like papa. We were all agreed upon one point —that you would be too short in the breath to bear the fatigue of much walking on the bogs. We thought you would want to be driven about sight-seeing, and entertained in that way; but when we found how different you were, we thought you wouldn't want us to amuse you. But the other day, when I had just finished my story, I thought I would tell you of it, because I wanted to take my day."

"Good fairy number one!" I said. "Well, Oona, when would you like the day to be? and what would you like to do? I should dearly love to hear my little girl's idea of the best way of entertaining me even for twenty-four hours!"

"But if you don't like the idea?"

"Then I'll say so!"

"Will you really? Then you shall

hear. I am afraid it is rather selfish," continued Oona, "but after all you may enjoy it. . . . Well, I should like the day to be to-morrow. I should like to make up a party, all the girls, papa, and you, and go for a day's excursion over to Kildare. Some of us would ride and some would drive. We could see the old castle and the village, take our luncheon with us, and get back in time for dinner in the evening, then after dinner I should like you to read my story. I think you would find it much more interesting after you had seen the place where the scene is laid."

The plan delighted me, and I said so to Oona's infinite satisfaction ; one thing only I stipulated for,—that I was to be allowed to read the story alone, after I had retired for the night.

Having thus arranged matters to our mutual satisfaction, we descended to the drawing-room, where tea was awaiting us. Upon Oona making her plans known, every

body seconded them, and without any demur it was agreed that the next day was to be christened

Oona's Day.

The next morning I rose early, half-an-hour before my usual time, but upon descending the stairs I found that preparations for the day's amusement were already in hand. Both Conolly and Shawn, bereft of both coat and waistcoat, were working with a will for once in their lives. Conolly was in the stable preparing the horses; Shawn was rubbing up the phaeton, and packing into it the luncheon baskets, well filled by Kate. There was also a large basket under Oona's special charge; it was filled with numerous packages of tea, sugar, tobacco, and little flasks of whisky, to be distributed amongst Kate's pensioners in the little village of Kildare. Kate had intended to be one of the party, but fate

was against her. Amy, who for some days had been suffering with a decaying tooth, rose that morning with a swelled face, and was crying with the intense pain, so Kate sent off Shawn's brother Mickie for Dr Maguire, and gave up her day's outing to attend to her sister at home.

By eight o'clock we were all assembled round the breakfast-table ready dressed for the day. The four girls wore riding-habits. Oona, who had donned hers for the first time since I came to Storport, looked prettier than I had ever seen her, and was responsible for the exceedingly meagre breakfast I took. Whether or not she was conscious of this I cannot say,—she scarcely looked my way at all, and took no notice whatever of me, and she succeeded in diverting general attention from me, at the expense of Aileen, whom she joked incessantly about Murray's particular attentions on the day before. In the middle of breakfast she left the table and went over to Amy, who sat by the fire

looking the picture of misery, with her head wrapped up in flannel.

Breakfast over, we all made a move.

"Now, girls," cried my uncle, "how are you going to place yourselves, for, sure enough, 'tis time we were started? Alley, will you ride? Jack, my boy, will you make a trial of Lucy? She's fresh after being stabled for a couple of days, and will do herself credit."

"Oh, papa, don't give Jack Lucy this morning!" cried Oona; then remembering herself, she came to a sudden and confused stop.

Lucy was my uncle's riding mare, a handsome thorough-bred, famous for bolting, and shying when ridden by a stranger, but as docile as a lamb beneath her master's hand. When she first came into the family, my uncle had intended her for a birthday present for one of the girls; in the nick of time, however, her infirmities were discovered. My uncle, finding her

quiet beneath his hand, decided to keep her for his own use, and forbade the girls to ride her. No sooner had the edict gone forth than Aileen, who was a wild, fearless horsewoman, was seized with a desire to have a canter on Lucy's back.

One day, when she and Nora were riding, they came upon Conolly, who was exercising the mare. The girls rode up to him, and Aileen, after a deal of persuasion, succeeded in inducing him to change the saddles, placing her own on Lucy's back, and his upon the horse on which she sat.

This done, Aileen, her eyes sparkling with delight, placed her foot in Conolly's hand, and leapt lightly into the saddle. Alas! no sooner was she fairly seated, and with the reins in her hand, than Lucy reared, plunged, turned round and round, and finally bolted across country at lightning speed. On she went, her neck swelling, her eyes glaring, and foam flying from her mouth,—over ditches and stone walls,

and across dangerous stretches of bog,—while Aileen, almost paralysed with fright, sat helpless in the saddle.

Being a good horsewoman, she managed to keep her seat until the mare galloped up the broad drive to Ballyshanrany, and paused before her stable door. Then Aileen fainted away.

From that day forth the girls regarded Lucy with positive terror; it was the remembrance of this which had made Oona's cheeks turn pale when her father proposed I should ride the mare.

Lucy was certainly very fresh that morning; she pawed the gravel, champed her bit, tossed her head, and looked ready for a race indeed. Not being an over-brilliant rider, I firmly refused my uncle's invitation to mount the mare, and he took her himself. Aileen and Nora sprang into their saddles, and the phaeton, drawn by a couple of sturdy ponies, was left for Biddy, Oona, and myself.

All the horses were tolerably fresh, and we started off at a spanking pace, the riders galloping on ahead, and Oona guiding her ponies with a wonderfully steady hand. For some distance the road which we traversed was the one which I had travelled on first coming to Storport, a dreary road enough, with flat stretches of bogland on either side of us, backed in the far distance by ranges of desolate-looking hills.

The weather had changed too, for the sun had disappeared behind banks of threatening clouds, and the usual mist was driving about like smoke.

We had left the village far behind, and were passing through a country as desolate looking as the prairies. Here and there we picked out a woman working diligently on the bog, sometimes we passed a donkey trudging sleepily along with its turf-laden panniers, and driven by a barefooted little urchin; but that was all. Presently the

riders slackened their speed. Shawn, who was seated in the rumble behind the carriage, spoke rapidly to Oona in the Irish tongue. She immediately pulled the ponies up.

"We are near the river," she said, addressing me, "and Shawn thinks you may find a few ducks lying under the bank. You needn't go unless you like; you'll have to pass over some nasty ground before you get a shot."

We had come to a standstill. Shawn had leapt from his seat, and was passing with immense strides over the bogland which lay on our right. The riders had fallen back, and my uncle, who was now close to the phaeton, called out,—

"Jack, my boy, out with your gun and away with you, for you are pretty sure of a duck. Stop a bit, I'll go along with you. Timlin, ye thief, come and hold Lucy, and see you hold her well."

So saying, he slipped from the saddle, threw the bridle to a ragged urchin who

had been at work cutting turf on the bog, and who came up immediately to my uncle's call, possessed himself of his gun, which had been packed away in the phaeton, and put some cartridges in his pocket. I hastened to follow his example, and we started off, shaping our course according to the signs we received from Shawn.

The ground on which our course lay was a black stretch of bogland, miry and spongy to the tread, interspread with tussocks of hard earth and stunted heather, so that our walk consisted of a series of jumps from one to another of these points of vantage. For a time we went along in this fashion, I keeping in the wake of my uncle, who, being well accustomed to that sort of thing, was bounding along like a boy. Presently, finding the muscles of my legs getting painful, and my breath about to leave me, I gazed around, and perceived what I believed a haven of rest, a broad piece

of land, green, fresh, and fair, lying exactly between Shawn and me.

I looked round, intending to point this out to my uncle, but he was already far on ahead, and keeping still to the tussocks which skirted this fresh, green plain. I dared not call aloud to him, for fear of disturbing the ducks, so I determined to let him go on and take advantage myself of the green sward.

I stepped upon it, heedless of the wild antics indulged in by Shawn, and found it decidedly moist, but after all, I mentally declared, an improvement on the tussocks. I had got about half-way over when my progress was arrested by loud cries, and looking round I perceived that both my uncle and Shawn were making the most violent gestures intended for my edification. Imagining that they were urging me on to greater speed, I quickened my footsteps, when all of a sudden I found that the earth had literally opened and swallowed me.

Yes, there I was, buried up to the arm-pits, and only saved from entire suffocation by the gun, which, by a lucky accident, rested on a couple of tussocks, and afforded me some support.

I was in and utterly helpless ; my legs and body were fast becoming frozen with the cold contact of mire, and I felt it was sucking me down.

"Lie quiet, yer honor, lie quiet," called Shawn, heedless now of ducks or geese either ; "don't move, but keep a firm hold of the gun."

I did as he suggested, and despite the deathly suction all around me, I managed to keep myself up, while Shawn and my uncle, keeping to the tussocks still, came up to within half-a-dozen yards of me. Then Shawn, who had taken from his waist certain coils of rope, which served him as braces, made a large noose, and threw it towards me. I managed with considerable difficulty to slip my arms through it. When this was

done, my uncle and Shawn laid hold of the other end, and they drew me out "pop" like a cork from a bottle. When the operation was over, and I stood upon a tussock safe and sound, my condition may be better imagined than described. I felt as if the lower part of my body was made of mud and ice, but both my uncle and Shawn were perspiring furiously.

"Keep to the tussocks in future, Jack!" said my uncle; "'tis the only foothold you can trust; besides, your next adventure of the kind may not end so well. I once had a valuable mare in the same plight, and as we couldn't get the poor beast out, we had to shoot her."

He then produced the flask, which he always carried in his breast-pocket of his shooting jacket, and gave us whisky all round. Knowing by this time that the ducks must have been frightened into the next county, we started for the road. As both the barrels of my gun were clogged

with filth, I handed it to Shawn, but my uncle managed to pick up a couple of solitary snipe which rose at his very feet.

When we reached the road we found the girls, who had watched the adventure, in a state of great excitement. They had all changed places too. Aileen and Nora were seated in the phaeton. Oona and Biddy had managed somehow to get into the saddles, and they one and all insisted that I must mount Lucy. Oona's fear of the mare seemed to me to have disappeared, but I afterwards discovered that she had mounted Jack with some wild idea of being at hand to preserve me from danger if Lucy should prove refractory.

So we started off again, and after a preliminary canter, during which I found Lucy the very queen of horse-flesh, I felt none the worse of my adventure. A warm glow was stealing all over me. I bent forward in my saddle, and the three horses, keeping well abreast, galloped merrily along the road.

In this manner we entered the village of Kildare.

The village proper consisted of a mere handful of huts, which looked as if they had been thrown up at random on the bog, just as moles throw up their tiny mounds of earth. They seemed to me to resemble the cabins inhabited by the Esquimaux, lying low, built of mud, and thatched with turf sods. Here and there at the doors an old woman was squatting on her haunches, smoking a black pipe, or two or three naked urchins were rolling in the sunlight.

I took one glance at the village, then I turned to Oona, who was pointing with her hand,—

"Look, Jack, look!" she said, "that is Kildare Castle."

The ruins of the old castle stood on a low, green promontory, or rather an isthmus, connected by a narrow neck of sand with the adjoining land. Part of it was roofless and uninhabited, save by a noisy flock of jack-

daws; but attached to the ruin was a low, modern-looking building, dilapidated enough, but still tolerably habitable. On the green swards in front large numbers of tame geese were feeding. Beyond stretched the estuary of the sea, broken into crisp light waves, and shifting its colours like a sword blade in the sun.

I had just finished my survey when the phaeton drove up, and there began a general discussion as to what we must all do. Of course it went without saying that Oona and I must inspect the castle, and Biddy volunteered to join us. My uncle preferred a couple of hours on the moor, while Aileen and Nora volunteered to distribute Kathleen's gifts, and afterwards to lay out the lunch, so as to have everything ready for a pleasant meal by the time we were all re-assembled. My uncle therefore took his gun and walked off, promising to be back at the hour fixed for lunch, while the rest of us pushed on across the isthmus to stable

the horses somewhere among the ruined castle walls.

Our progress was somewhat slow, for the road was as neglected as the castle itself. It was full of deep ruts, covered with stones, and overgrown with rank weeds and grass; but we crossed the isthmus in safety, and leaving the modern building on one side, passed under a ruined archway, covered with rank moss and trailing ivy leaves. We found ourselves in an old grass-paven courtyard, at the further end of which was an open door leading to the castle tower.

Leaving our horses to graze in the court-yard, we climbed the winding stairs of the tower, and soon found ourselves high up among the ruins. Below us lay the interior of the old building—roofless, grass-paven, and strewn with stones, surrounded on every side by ruined walls, broken arches, and fragments of masonry. The jackdaws rose screaming over our heads, and hovered

against the blue sky. Right below us lay the sea, breaking against the black rocks of the promontory.

From point to point we crept up mouldering stairs, which suddenly ceased in mid-air, into dark holes and corners, that had once been rooms, down right under the ruins, where there was actually a real "dungeon." We had no guide, and thanked Heaven for that escape; but Oona acted informally as *cicerone*, without boring us with irrational history and impossible legends, till our tour of merry inspection came to an end.

We had lingered so long a time in the ruin, looking over the relics of the past, and discussing Oona's story, that when we came down we found the girls and my uncle actually awaiting lunch. A goodly-sized wooden table had been carried from the neighbouring building into the courtyard, and upon this the lunch was spread—all sorts of cakes and dainties, baked by Kath-

leen's deft hand, with some wine and whisky to wash them down. By this time our arrival had become known, and the population of the village seemed to be turning out to welcome us.

Dozens of ragged gorsoons, looking like little savages, with unkempt heads and bare feet, clustered round the open gateway, or glared through every loophole within reach, while the cauliaghs, young colleens, and men of the village came up to welcome "his honour" and the "young ladies—God bless them!"

With their assistance Alley and Nora managed to empty the baskets which had been sent by Kate.

We had a capital lunch — feeling very romantic all the while, with the ruined walls about us, and the open sky above us.

We were waited on by Shawn and the withered-looking old cauliagh who kept the castle. When it was over, we lit up our cigars and strolled out upon the pro-

montory, leaving a goodly proportion of food and wine to be distributed at Shawn's discretion.

It was getting on in the afternoon, and as the day waned, the weather grew brighter. The sun was shining now from a cloudless sky, and when I looked back I thought the village of Kildare as picturesque a portion of wild Connaught as I had seen, and the old castle, in whose shadow I was standing, looked the most charming of all. For the sun sparkled amidst its ivy-leaves, and revivified the crumbling walls, while below it the sea washed with ceaseless music.

"Look," said Oona, laying her hand upon my arm, and pointing.

Some yards distant, and right under the ruins, there lay an old well, reached by a few broken steps. It seemed desolate and disused, but, looking down, I saw the water black and cool.

"Do you know," whispered Oona, "the people here say that, at some seasons of the

year, the water down there is red! Two brothers fought there, and the murdered body of one was found floating in the well!"

"Have you got that in the story?"

"Oh, don't laugh!" said Oona. "These terrible things are true!"

We took a short stroll along the water's edge, talking of this and other superstitions. When we got back to the castle, we found that everything was in readiness for our departure,—the horses were saddled, the ponies harnessed, the phaeton neatly packed again. The crowd around the castle walls had increased; its members were evidently waiting to give us a wild cheer as we started. Again the discussion began as to how we must dispose ourselves, when Oona spoke.

"We will start just as we did this morning," she said, "and when we're halfway we'll change. You three will take the phaeton, and we'll have the horses for the last canter home—eh, Jack?"

But I shook my head.

"Won't do at all," I said. "*We* will take the horses in starting, and when we've cantered halfway, you must be content to sit quietly in the phaeton, Oona, and I'll drive the ponies home!"

I had reflected that during the latter half of our return journey the earth would be plunged in that dim uncertain light which makes the most prosaic soul romantic—that during this time I should love to be seated in the phaeton with Oona nestling on the rugs by my side, and probably her little hand lying warm and tremulous on mine.

My wishes carried the day, and during the latter half of that return journey I felt like a man entranced. When I pulled up the ponies at the door of the Lodge, and saw Kate standing on the threshold with a candle in her hand, I startled as one awakening from a dream. I extricated Oona from her rugs, and lifted her out, and as I did so I saw that her eyes were sparkling with a dreamy kind of joy, and

her cheeks were suffused with love's own red.

I followed Kate into the Lodge, and, in answer to her inquiry, assured her it had been the happiest day I had ever spent in my life.

I went to bed very early that night, but when once I was comfortably settled on my pillows I took out Oona's manuscript, and proceeded to read her story.

Here it is.

I.

How the wind blew! How the rain poured! The substantial walls of Kildare Castle seemed to be shaken to their foundations, and above the dreary moaning of the wind came the ceaseless patter of the rain.

"The Lord preserve us! what a night," said Bridget O'Rook, as she threw a liberal supply of turf on the blazing kitchen fire;

"and as if it wasn't bad enough to listen to the wind and the rain, there's the whole of ye sitting like *taisches*. It's a poor place is Kildare Castle when Master Conn is away! Andy Beg, ye lazy loon ye! if ye've any life in ye, play us a tune; and if ye cannot dance *patter-a-pie*, or sing a song, or tell a tale. Owen More, ye might as well have stayed in yer own house to-night!"

"I'll play ye a tune, an' welcome, Bridget, *machree*," said the ragged-looking ruffian addressed, as he polished his tin-whistle on his ragged coat-sleeve; "only I was thinking that maybe the master wouldn't be so well plased to hear us to-night."

"And why not, pray?" sharply returned Bridget. "Isn't it the young master who left us two years ago to go to America that we're expecting home; and hasn't Master Conn gone to fetch home one that we shall all be proud of? This night should be a night of rejoicing, Owen Mare!"

"And that's true enough, Mistress Bridget.

But, in troth, I'm hoping the young master won't come to-night. God help them that this wailing wind blows home!"

With eyes staring wide in astonishment, and a frown of resentment on her brow, Bridget was about to reply, when the kitchen-door suddenly opened, and another figure crept in. The rain beat in behind the new-comer, and the fierce gusts of wind scattered the white ashes on the hearth; but the door was quickly banged to, and the new-comer unslung a canvas bag which was buckled around his rain-drenched shoulders, and threw it on to the kitchen table.

"No letters to-night, Mistress Bridget, but good news!" he said. "The cutter, wid the young mashter on board, is in the shelter of Mackinray, and by this time the young mashter has landed!"

"Is that true, Shamus O'Neil?"

"Sure enough. I was crossing the sands wid the letters, and when I saw the light, and knew well enough what it was, I just

gave the word to the boys that were on the shore, and they took the ferry-boat out, and then they gave one shout to tell me that the young mashter was landing!"

Not a word answered Bridget; but she left the kitchen, tripped nimbly along the hall, and gently opened the library door.

"Mr Antony is come, yer honour," she said, to an old gentleman who sat reading by the fire. Her words were literally true. No sooner had she uttered them than a wild banging and shouting was heard without, and, on the hall-door being thrown open, a dark figure strode in.

The heavy gust of wind which blew him across the threshold was so confusing that none could see his face; but Bridget, recognising the deformed figure wrapped in the heavy ulster, and wearing a dripping wide-awake hat, said, as she hastily stepped back out of the region of the wind and rain,—

"Yer welcome, Mr Antony!"

"It's a wild night I've brought with me,

Bridget," returned Antony Ross. "Pile up the kitchen fire, give the skipper some supper, and the boys a glass all round, for we're drenched to the skin." Then passing into the library, and taking his father's hand, he asked quickly,—

"Is Alma here?"

"Miss Clifford?" returned the old man, who still held the hand of his drenched and storm-tossed son. "No, she's not here, Antony. What madcap freak made you weather the storm to-night?"

The young man laughed.

"I'm not sugar to be blown away by a puff of wind, or melted with a little rain. The skipper wanted to turn tail when the storm began, but I determined to push on. I thought Alma would be here, and I wanted to be able to welcome her home."

The old man smiled.

"If you are not sugar, Antony, my boy, you're soft enough about Miss Clifford. But

put your mind at rest about her to-night; she's safe with Conn!"

In a moment, as the old man mentioned that name, he saw the features of his son contract as with acute pain, the sun-tanned cheek turned white as death, the powerful hands grew cold and tremulous.

"Conn!" he echoed faintly; "has *he* gone to *her?*"

"Yes, he has gone," returned the old man quickly, as he narrowly watched the face of his son. "The poor child was naturally unhinged by her father's sudden death, and could not travel so far alone; and as Conn was at home, and as he is soon to be her brother, why what could I do but send him to bring her here?"

The old man paused, but still his son said nothing. The contraction of agony had left his face, but still his cheeks were pale, his hands cold and clammy.

"Antony," said the old man, placing his trembling hand on his son's broad shoulder,

"ever since you left this house two years ago, I have prayed nightly to God that the bitterness might be taken from your heart erey ou came back again—yes, prayed that you two might learn to love one another, and that the curse of Cain which was for ever overhanging our house might at length be cleared away. My boy, don't let me think that I have prayed in vain! For God's sake, let me see you like brothers for once; let me know that you can love one another before I die!"

"*I* love *Conn?*" repeated the young man dreamily, wiping the cold perspiration which had gathered on his brow. "I have tried not to hate him, father, but what cause have I to love him?"

"He is your brother!"

"Yes, he is my brother; and all his life his aim has been to blacken the earth for me. *He made me what I am.* If I made a friend, he stepped in and robbed me of that friend. He knew I had your affection, —he tried to alienate that; if I won any

love, he tore it from me; he has been to me like the blight that passes over the earth, and withers up the leaves and flowers; and yet, father, if he leaves me Alma Clifford, you shall not have prayed in vain! I shall be able to put my hand in his and say, 'Conn, *acushla!* henceforth let us be brothers. I forgive you all!'"

With a wild, nervous, tremulous clasp, he pressed the hand which lay in his; then he turned hurriedly, and left the room. He passed along the dimly-lighted hall, up the old oak stairs, and into a spacious old-fashioned chamber, where a turf fire was smouldering on the hearth. He threw off his saturated overcoat, sank into a chair which was drawn up beside the fire, thrust his hand into his breast, and drew forth a picture. A miniature, painted in softly tinted colours, and representing the head of a lovely girl. The face was turned upward, revealing the soft outline of throat and bust, and delicately tinted cheeks set in a wealth of golden

hair. The soft red lips were smiling, the lustrous eyes, shaded with slumbrous lids and long dark lashes, were gazing full into the dark silent face which bent above. All round the room the wind wailed, and upon the windows rattled the heavy drops of rain; through the halls of the old castle the faint sounds of music were wafted, mingled with the merry laughter of boys and girls.

Seen in the dim light of the room, Antony Ross looked handsome enough; but his head was set low down behind his shoulders, his breast protruded, and his back had a decided hump. This defect of his figure had told upon his health, so that he was strangely pale for a man accustomed to face sun and wind in all weathers.

Scarcely hearing, and utterly indifferent, the young master of the old house sat alone gazing at the picture in his hand. Presently his head bent down lower, and with burning lips he kissed the cold shining glass.

"My Alma!" he murmured. "My hope,

my love, my life,—yes, with *you* by my side I could forgive him; but if he came between you and me, I think that I should kill him!"

II.

While the eyes of the picture were gazing into the dark face of the man who sat alone in the lonely room, the eyes of the original of that picture were lowered before the gaze of another man. Miss Clifford and her escort Conn Ross having been overtaken by the storm which raged a whole day and night along the north-west coast, had been compelled to break their journey, and seek shelter in a village which lay some twenty miles from Kildare Castle. When, therefore, the shadows of night fell upon the land, when the wind was moaning, the rain pouring, the sea raging, she sat in warmth and comfort reclining listlessly in an easy-chair, her companion by her side.

Conn was a young man of about two-and-twenty, tall and shapely, with broad powerful shoulders and a finely moulded head and face. His features were Grecian in outline, his cheeks faintly tanned with the sun; a fair moustache shaded his mouth, and his head was covered with a wealth of nut-brown hair. He had so often heard that he was the handsomest fellow in Connaught that he had at length accepted the belief that, take him all in all, there were few to approach him; hence, therefore, that air of perfect self-confidence and calm self-contentment, which in many other men would have been an offence. In Conn, however, there was such an air of simple manliness and *bonhomie* as to disarm all severity, and win affection for him wherever he went.

Alma Clifford sat in her chair, ostensibly holding her red-slippered feet before the blaze of the fire, but covertly studying the face of her companion. They had been

silent for some time; suddenly she spoke,—

"Do you know, Mr Ross, when I first saw you I thought you were Antony!"

He looked up quickly, then he threw back his head and laughed gaily.

"You don't say so!" he exclaimed; and at his merriment the girl's face fell.

"Well," she returned, more tartly, "there was nothing in that to make you laugh so! He is your brother, and I think you all resemble each other!"

Conn did not reply this time. At this bold assertion both his merriment and his speech seemed to have got a sudden check.

"When I saw him last," continued the girl, "I was certainly only ten years old, and at that age one does not notice much, but it seems to me, from what I remember of him, that he must be very like you."

Again she glanced half eagerly towards him, but his head was turned away and he said nothing.

"Well, am I not right?" she continued impatiently, for there was something in his manner which annoyed her; "are you not considered like each other?"

He rose abruptly, walked up and down the room, with his face still averted, and replied,—

"Well, yes, now you mention it, I suppose we are."

Presently he ceased walking, drew his chair up beside her, and asked, bending low and looking into her face,—

"Well, Alma, are you satisfied?"

"Yes," she answered dreamily.

He smiled, but her face remained grave. At that moment her gaze was riveted on the past, and she saw standing before her a lad with flashing dark eyes and bright handsome face, who said, "Good-bye, Alma, good-bye; you are my little sweetheart, remember, and when I am a man I shall come and marry you." How she had loved that child, and though she had not seen

him for eight long, weary years, how the memory of that last parting still made her heart beat.

It was the memory of that time which had made her so pliant to her father's wishes, so ready, nay, almost eager to give the promise which he asked.

"Alma, my darling," he had said, "promise me that, when I am laid to rest, you will travel back to Ireland and marry young Antony Ross."

And Alma, bending low and slipping her hand into his, had whispered,—

"Dear father, I promise!" And with those words ringing in his ears, he uttered a sigh, and passed away.

A few days later, when Colonel Clifford was laid to rest, his will was opened, and Alma found herself a tolerably rich woman. One half of his large fortune was left to her unconditionally, the other half "to Antony Ross, to pass into his possession on the day of his marriage with my be-

loved daughter Alma. If the marriage does not take place, the whole to remain the property of Alma alone."

How Alma had smiled when she heard that, for she said to herself,—"Antony is safe."

She had seen fine faces, had many handsome wooers in her life, but her heart had remained faithful to her boy lover. Though she had not seen him for so long, letters had come telling her of his struggles, his hopes and fears, and always ending with a picture of the bright future which they would one day share together. "My Alma," he wrote only a short time before, "my own bright, beautiful girl, you are the one golden thread which binds me to this world. You are my salvation; without the knowledge of your truth and love, life would be a blank to me—I should think it best to lie down and die!" And yet, though he loved her so, he had never

once, during all those years, expressed a wish to look upon her face.

"Have you never thought it strange that Antony shouldn't have come to see you all these years?"

The voice that was speaking so close to her, uttering, as it were, her thoughts aloud, startled her. She flushed slightly, then, after a while, answered composedly enough.

"Yes, I have sometimes thought it curious; but again, when I have reflected, my suspicions have seemed so unjust that I have crushed them away. His love for me has not died; indeed I think that every year it has grown stronger, and since that is so, why, I have nothing to fear."

Conn raised his eyes and looked at the lovely face which was turned towards the fire, and lit by the faint fire-glow.

It was the very counterpart of the picture. The rounded cheek, the delicately

curved mouth and nostril, the large, lustrous violet eyes, shaded by black lashes. The crape bands which had bound her hair were loosened, and the glittering threads of hair fell in a shimmering veil about her shoulders, brightening and darkening in the faint fire-light. As the young man gazed at her, a perplexed expression crossed his countenance.

"By the way, have you got a portrait of Antony?" he asked suddenly.

"No!"

"And you have never seen him since you were ten years old?"

"Have I not told you so?"

"But he has surely seen you?"

"I think not. I sent him a painted miniature of myself, and he wrote it was just what he had imagined me to be. It was the same, yet not the same—he had left me a lovely child, I had grown to a lovely woman!"

The words were spoken not vainly but

dreamily, as if the thoughts of the speaker were still buried in the past.

There was silence between them for a time. Presently Conn spoke again,—

"Your father was anxious for you two to marry, was he not?"

"Yes — very. It was mainly through him that we were betrothed as children,— and on the morning of the day when he went out to meet his death, he was talking of my marriage with Antony, and he told me then that the reason he was so fond of Antony was because—because of the great love he had once borne to Antony's mother. She was not your mother, was she?"

"No. I believe she died when Antony was born!"

"Ah, it was your mother who brought all the money to Kildare Castle then. Do you know that papa has left Antony the half of all he had?—though, indeed, he need not have done so, since what is mine is his."

"You are not married to him yet!" said Conn softly.

"No, not yet," she answered; "but it's almost the same thing you know, I have known Antony so long. Why, I saw you for the first time the day before yesterday, and yet, because you are Antony's brother, I feel that you are mine!"

He laughed lightly.

"That makes it very nice to be Antony's brother," he said. "But," he added to himself, "I would rather be Antony!"

Nevertheless, he found it pleasant for the time being to be what he was, since it gave him the privilege of being near to her.

"I wonder why he laughed so when I said he was like Antony?" thought Alma, when she was alone that night. "He admitted afterwards that I was right, and yet he still looked amused. It must have been because I had forgotten whether he was fair

or dark. Of course he is dark—very dark. His hair is black, so are his eyes; but in every other respect he must be very like Conn."

All that night the wind blew violently, but in the morning the storm had ceased. The travellers started early, for now that they had got so far, they both seemed eager to reach their journey's end.

As the car rolled on, taking them after every mile through wilder and more desolate scenes, the girl grew strangely silent. Wild thoughts chased each other through her brain—thoughts of how she was to meet this man with whom she felt so familiar, and yet so strange. She knew him, and yet she did not know him; the picture of him which she had loved all these years was still vividly before her. But now she was near her journey's end, she felt that the reality would be strange to her indeed. She was at length awakened from her dream by her companion singing aloud,—

"'To the Currach of Kildare
The boys they will repair,
And Lord Edward will be there,
Says the Shan Van Vocht!'

"Look, Alma!" continued Conn, suddenly stopping his song, "the boys have seen us, and no mistake, and carried the news to the castle. Can't you see Kildare? There it is, look—close by. Are you cold? We shall soon be safely housed now. What a throng of ragamuffins round the door! I must throw them a handful of coppers, I suppose. By Jove! they mean to honour you. Look at the bonfire on the castle cliff! There's our old family standard waving from the battlements! There's Father Shamus, God bless him! and—by Jupiter! there's Antony."

"Antony!—where?" she asked, rising excitedly to her feet. But Conn put his arms around her and drew her down again.

"Don't get excited," he whispered, "and don't look—yet!"

Five minutes afterwards the car stopped, and Conn lifted her down.

By this time her excitement was tremendous. She stood pale and trembling, conscious only of the wild, ragged crowd which surrounded her.

"Welcome to Kildare," whispered Conn, adding quickly, "see, here is Antony to welcome you too."

Then, and not till then, the girl became aware that a figure was approaching her with eager, outstretched arms. She suddenly grew cold and sick.

"Is this Antony?" she gasped unconsciously, drawing close to her companion's side.

"Yes, Alma, I am Antony," answered the man. As he spoke he looked at her; his cheek grew white as death; he made no further attempt to approach her, but staggered back like a drunken man.

III.

There is silence in and around Kildare—the silence of complete repose. The ragged crowd dispersed several hours ago, and now the shivering creatures are all shut up, like beavers, in their little mud huts; the car which took home the priest has returned, and at length all the inmates of the castle are at rest.

All?—no, there is one at least beneath the castle roof that night to whose wearied brain rest will not come; indeed, it seems to Alma that her mind will never be at peace again.

After the first shock produced by the sight of her lover was over, she had conquered herself sufficiently to enter the castle with a smile upon her lips and in her eyes; she had composedly given her cheek for the old man's caress; she had answered his tender inquiries about her

father, her journey, herself; and she had laughed merrily, though somewhat hysterically, at the funny stories told by the priest; but the moment she found herself alone she sat down in a strange bewildered way, and tried to think.

But she could not think. She felt like one weary unto death. Her head was aching; her heart was beating; her hands were cold as ice. The deep silence of the house oppressed her; she threw open her window, and leaning out upon the sill, listened to the wild sobbing of the sea.

It was a calm still night, scarce a breath was stirring; the heavens were black—dark, but ever and anon a star peeped out from amid the troubled masses of cloud which covered the sky; the air was very cold—it touched her burning cheek and lips, and gently stirred the masses of rippling gold which lay upon her shoulders. How the sea was moaning after the wild trouble of the storm! The waters surged in and out

of the caverns, and the white foam was beaten about the cliffs.

And so Alma had seen her lover; at last she had come face to face with the man whose image had filled her soul for so many years; and what then? She recalled his letters, one by one, and each one seemed to be a dagger piercing her heart. She thought of the love, the wild, consuming passion of which those letters spoke, and the memory made her heart sick. A vision of her lover, deformed and sinister as she had seen him that night, flashed across her brain, and she covered her eyes, as if to shut out the sight, and moaned.

She rose from the window, and turned away; she would think no more. Her hands were burning feverishly now, her cheeks and lips were like fire. Leaving the window open, for the air of the room seemed stifling, she threw herself, dressed as she was, upon the bed, and closed her eyes. At last she slept. Slept and dreamed,

—for in her sleep she seemed to be flying wildly through desolate wastes, and as she went she heard footsteps pursuing her, and turning, she saw that face—pale as when she last had seen it—weary, haggard, and wild. The great black eyes were burning upon hers, the arms were extended, while the livid lips murmured "My Alma!" At the sight she screamed and fled the faster, but the figure came swiftly on. Suddenly she saw that huge caverns were opening all around her,—she heard wild cataracts moaning, and felt the icy touch of the wind. Again she glanced backward, when she saw that the dark figure was still pursuing her, the white face coming nearer and nearer to hers; the arms were extended now, and about to clasp her, and she shrieked aloud and woke. Awoke to feel the bitter wind blowing upon her, to hear the wild sobbing of the sea without.

She arose, and looked wildly around her.

She had been sleeping for hours. The

ashes of the fire lay dead and cold upon the hearth, and now the room was flooded with the cold, white, light of day. Her head was aching worse than ever; she felt feverish and unrefreshed, but she would not sleep again; the memory of her dream made her tremble, as if she were afraid. She closed her window, and at once proceeded mechanically enough, and with little thought of her appearance, to make her toilet for the day. When this was done, she opened her door and listened. No one was astir. She put on her hat and jacket, then softly descended the stairs, and left the house.

A dreary landscape surrounded Kildare Castle, and before it was the sweep of the open sea. The old standard, a strip of green decorated with a harp of gold, hung like a limp rag above the battlements, and the cold, bare walls looked very chilly, set as they were in a dark background of bogland and mist. For miles around

stretched black, boggy wastes, desolate as the wastes of her dream, relieved only by mouldering greystone walls and wretched hovels of mud and straw. Far away, like a white face staring at her from the bog, she saw a little chapel, and near to it, crouching beneath its wing, the tumble-down residence of Father Shamus. Although it was still early, wretched figures, male and female, clad in picturesque rags, and carrying creels upon their backs, were trudging hither and thither across the bog, and one or two curraghs were sailing, like black specks, upon the sea. All was placid, cold and grey. The waters of the sea were peaceful, save where the great black caverns sucked them in, then cast them back a mass of seething foam; but far away, where the bogland rose to hills, the mist fell, veiling the topmost peaks, and darkening into a threatening line along the horizon.

Taking mechanically a path which led along the cliffs, Alma walked slowly on.

She was still too dazed to think, but her large, lustrous eyes dreamily swept the scene around her. She looked at the white gulls which came hovering in the air above her, at the black cormorants which darkened the rocks below, and she listened dreamily to the washing of the waves, and opened her lips to drink in the keen fresh air, but all the while her soul was far away. Presently she paused and looked back.

There, on the summit of the hill, stood Kildare Castle, its chimneys now sending forth thin lines of blue smoke, the folds of its tattered standard shaken out by the rising breeze, and waving faintly. Then she sat down on a boulder which lay close to the edge of the high cliff, and turned her face twards the sea.

How long she remained thus she did not know. Her trance at length was broken by the sound of a human voice.

"So I have found you at last," it said. "Do you know I have been searching about

for the last-half hour, and when I could not find you, I began to think that you had run away?"

IV.

Alma did not require to raise her eyes to recognise the speaker; she knew that the rich, full-toned voice belonged to Conn.

Yes, there he stood, looking handsomer than ever that morning, with the flush of health on his brown cheek, the light of laughter in his bright blue eyes. How tall and fair, and powerful he was; and this morning he seemed to hold himself erect and throw up his head with a prouder air than usual; and when, in his merry courteous way, he raised his right hand and swept off his hat, the sunlight, struggling faintly through the dewy mist, just touched with gold his clustering curls of hair, while the breeze swept caressingly across his bold white brow!

As Alma, raising her eyes, beheld him, she felt her pale face flush, then with a quick, almost petulant movement, she turned her head away, and took no notice whatever of his extended hand.

"Why, what is the matter?" asked Conn, taking a seat on the cliff before her, and thrusting his rejected hand into the pocket of his coat; and then seeing that her lips were quivering, her eyes filling with tears, he added quickly,—"Alma, what have I done to pain you?"

"It is not what you have done, but what you have *not* done!" returned the girl. "Do you think it was fair or kind or generous to bring me here, and never say a word? I did not expect you to be generous to me; but he is your brother, you might have spared him!"

All the brightness faded from Conn's face, he took the girl's hand, and bent earnestly over her.

"Alma," he said, "if you knew all you

would not speak to me like that, and if—if you were not what you are I should walk away back to Kildare and say nothing; perhaps it might be the wisest plan, but I can't do it—I could'nt bear to be misjudged by you. You say I should have spoken; if I had, what then? You would never have come to Kildare, Antony would have said I had separated you, and God only knows there might have been bloodshed between us!"

He felt the little hand tremble in his grasp, the cheeks went pale as death, but Alma did not answer.

"A week ago," continued Conn quietly, "it was a matter of perfect indifference to me whom Antony married, but when I saw you I was amazed, for I thought you *knew;* afterwards, when I found you did not, I could not speak, for I thought she shall see for herself, and then she will be satisfied to end the farce and return!"

The girl's face went paler still; she rose excitedly to her feet.

"You think a life-long tie can be so easily broken? You think the love which has filled our hearts for years can be cast aside like an old gown, and forgotten?"

"Pardon me," said Conn quietly. "I never said that Antony would change; he has no cause, he has got the best of the bargain!"

"Then you confine the heartlessness to *me*. You think that because Antony is—well, what he is, I should be justified in saying 'My dream is over; our compact is at an end. Good bye!'"

"Yes," said Conn boldly, "I think you would be justified!"

Alma did not reply this time, for the memory of last night came back upon her and turned her heart sick. Were not these the very thoughts which had come unbidden to her brain? Had she not said to herself over and over again: "If the shock has killed my love it is no wonder. I have not

met my lover, the handsome, brave man whom I have dreamed of all these years, but a monster who has taken his name, and whom I cannot love, and since this is so, why let the blame rest with him who has allowed me to indulge in a dream, which he knew must sooner or later be so cruelly dispelled." All she did was to turn away her face and murmur faintly,—

"He cannot help being what he is."

"No," said Conn, "he can't help it, sure enough, but he should have been man enough to tell you years ago!"

Again the echo of her thought. Alma felt her heart pulsating madly, but she turned now and looked her companion in the face.

"Perhaps we had better not talk any more about Antony," she said; and Conn, shrugging his shoulders, cordially endorsed her words.

"It can't be a pleasant subject to either of us," he said; "but promise me this, Alma,

that whatever happens between you two, *we* shall ever remain friends!"

"Yes, I promise," returned Alma quietly. Then she took his proffered arm, and walked with him along the cliffs towards Kildare Castle.

The day had brightened hour by hour, and now the sun had drawn the mist from the hills, and was shining brightly on the bogs and on the sea.

The seagulls screamed still above them, and the great cormorants flapped their black wings on the rocks below.

The waters were troubled, for the yawning caverns sucked them up still, and spat out the hissing foam, which spread like a white shroud upon the sea. Walking thus, supported by a strong arm, conscious of a protecting presence near, and surrounded by the glory and mystery of such a scene, Alma's troubled soul grew more at peace.

Presently she raised her eyes to his face, and as she did so her pale cheek flushed.

That quick movement of the head had told her that they were now beneath the shadow of Kildare Castle, and as she raised her eyes they met a pair of flashing black orbs which were gazing from the window above. What had happened to the morning? had a blight passed over the land? Alma shuddered as she entered the castle door.

. . . . . .

"Alma, my little darling! is it really you? Last night I dreamed that you were taken from me, and when I woke this morning I thought the dream must augur ill; but now I hold your hand and see your face, I laugh at such shadowy warnings, and frel they are quite untrue!"

The betrothed lovers were alone at last—alone in the great dining-hall of Kildare Castle, with the faint misty light stealing in upon them through the open window, and silence all around. He stood before her holding her hands, clasping them with a feverish, passionate clasp, although they lay like lead.

"My little darling!" he said, pressing her hand still tighter, "when you shrank away from me last night, I thought you had dealt my death-blow; see what a coward love makes of a man! and for the first time I felt sorry that you did not know."

"Why did you not tell me?" asked the girl faintly, and Antony replied,—

"Because I was afraid!—yes, afraid! for I tell you love has made a coward of me. Listen, Alma! When first I found that I was maimed and crippled, I thought, 'I will say nothing,—if I do, her love may die, and then death to me too! This cannot last for ever. In two or three years I shall be right again, and then little Alma will bless me for sparing her the knowledge of so much pain!'"

He paused as if expecting a reply, but none came. Alma's cheeks grew paler in the faint grey light which suffused her face and form; her hands were cold and tremulous; her heart grew fainter in her breast.

She stood silent for a time, conscious of his feverish clasp, his burning, eager look; then with an effort she raised her eyes, and forced her cold lips to speak.

"But afterwards," she said, "when you found that you were changed for life, why did you not tell me?"

"Why? Well, because I was a fool then as well as a coward. I should have told you all I know, but you had grown dearer to me than my life, and I could not risk the chance of losing you. Oh, my darling, if it hadn't been for you, God only knows what I might have become! Mine has been a hard life, Alma. Sometimes I have sat down and thought, 'Where is the use of all this struggle, and turmoil, and pain? Why not end it?' and then the thought of you came back upon me, and I knew there was one to sweeten life's bitter cup even for *me!*"

He paused again, and this time the silence was broken by Alma's sobs. The room was

shrouded in darkness now, save where the faint grey light fell about the window and the door. Alma could not see her lover, but the gentle pathos of his words, the passionate ring of his voice, had touched a tender chord and stirred up the memory of years.

"You should have trusted me!" she sobbed, bowing her head upon his arm. "How could you value my love, when you thought it would die so soon?"

As her face touched his arm, his whole body trembled like a leaf. He gently put his arm around her.

"Alma," he said, "I never thought your love would die,—if I had, the farce would have been ended years ago!"

"And yet you did not trust me?"

"And yet I did not trust you! I could not. My hand would not write the words —my lips would not utter them. But that is past and gone. You have seen, my darling, you know, and still I hold you here!"

She was still sobbing; her face was buried on his shoulder, his arm clasped around her.

"Since that day when I looked in the mirror, and saw and knew the truth, I have never had the heart to say a prayer. All the kindliness of my nature was turned to gall, Alma, and I cursed instead of prayed! But to-night I shall say a prayer. God is good! I have not suffered in vain. My trials were all as nought compared with the blessing which He has given me now!"

With an effort Alma conquered her sobs, and, raising her eyes, looked into his. She stretched out her arms towards him; her lips were open to speak the answer to his prayer, when suddenly the moon burst forth in all her splendour, and her light pouring in a flood through the window, lit up a figure which stood outside. It was Conn, bareheaded, dressed negligently in a suit of grey tweed, and smoking a cigar. As he strolled past the window, he was carelessly singing a song,—

"I'll leave my people, both friend and foe,
From all the girls in the world I'll go;
But from you, sweetheart, oh, never, oh no,
Till I'll lie in the coffin stretched cold and low.
Then, Ora, come with me, come with me, come with me,
Ora, come with me, brown girl sweet;
And oh I would go through snow and sleet,
If you would come with me, brown girl sweet!"

As the figure passed into the darkness and the voice faded away, Alma's arms fell powerless by her side, and the words upon her lips remained unspoken.

During these two interviews, both of the brothers had omitted to mention one important fact, — Conn had remained silent from a certain sense of shame, Antony because he wished to spare his brother. Therefore Alma was kept in ignorance of the fact that it was no other indeed than Conn who had dealt the blow which had deformed his brother for life.

V.

A period of gloomy weather succeeded Alma's arrival at Kildare. First the rain fell, then white mists covered the hill-tops, and a damp cold wind blew in from the troubled sea.

It was very dreary in the day-time, but drearier still at night. Often as Alma lay in her bed she was awakened from troublesome dreams by the breaking of the waves below, the low moaning of the wind, or the whining of the dogs chained in the court-yard. Conn was away from home. He had left the castle on a fishing expedition among the hills, and was not expected to return for several days; but Antony was there, and day after day he was ever at her side, either on the hills or the sea.

Despite his care, each day found the girl's cheek a shade paler. Her mind was restless and ill at ease. It seemed to her that the

sunlight had never penetrated into those gloomy regions, either to brighten the landscape or the dismal lives of those who dwelt upon the land. A dreary people they seemed to her, with hearts of lead and heavy mournful eyes, content to live, and toil, and die, so long as the roof above them remained the same, and they were sure of having the waves break upon the sands hard by their graves.

The strange, dark, gloomy eyes of these people—savages she called them—seemed to haunt her out of hope, their low monotonous voices to ring ominously in her ears. She was beginning to get fanciful too, and to imagine that the dreary old castle was haunted. Often, as she lay awake at night, she fancied she heard the rushing of feet along the corridors ; strange cold winds seemed to be wafted about her room, bringing her the echo of dreary moans.

In these days, if she had had any one at hand in whom she could have confided, she

might have cast aside these dreary fancies, and with an effort have shaken off the fear which was creeping so coldly about her heart as if to still its beating.

But she had no one.

She shrank from the thought of confiding in Bridget, the housekeeper of Kildare Castle; Mr Ross, the master, would, she felt sure, look at her in such a way as to quench her confidence at the very outset; and of Antony she had almost grown afraid. Why, she did not know. She only felt that she was amongst a race of people who seemed to be of a different species to others she had known, and that the strangest and most unsympathetic of all was the man whom she had come there to marry.

"Where was Conn?" she asked herself again and again. "Why had he gone and left her there? He was the only human being who seemed earthly, and yet he had departed and left her there alone. Was that short happy time which she had spent

with him only a dream? Was she destined never to see his face again?"

Once, she had ventured to mention his name to Antony, but as she had done so, a look so sinister had darkened his face, that she had grown more and more afraid. And so the gulf which was separating them seemed to widen. After that she had not dared to mention Conn's name, but she thought of him more and more, and wondered at the hatred which his brother seemed to bear him.

But if she did not confide in her lover, she could not altogether conceal her sorrow from him. He watched the roses gradually fade from her cheeks, the brightness from her eyes; as her reserve increased his face grew darker. At last he took the initiative, and tried to gain her confidence himself.

It was one evening when they were walking together towards Kildare. A couple of hours before they had left the castle in bright sunshine, but now a thick cold mist

enveloped them like a shroud. Alma could feel it clinging to her clothes, and hair, and she shivered violently.

"Alma," said her lover bending towards her, and taking her cold hands in his, "Alma, my darling, when are we to marry?"

The girl started, her heart seemed suddenly to stand still, she uttered a faint cry, and paused trembling.

"What is the matter?" he cried anxiously, and at this the girl tried to force a smile, but only shivered, and cast a weary look about her.

"I must have been dreaming," she said, "when your voice awoke me! See how I tremble; had we not better hasten home, for I am so cold?"

The rain indeed was gathering thicker and thicker around them, the silence was broken only by the low moaning of the sea. They walked on; Alma could see the black tower of the castle looming through the mist when her lover spoke again.

"Well, Alma," he said, more gravely this time, "you have not answered my question. When will you let me call you wife?"

She was not looking at him, she seldom did that now; but he was watching her, and he saw that a look of positive pain passed across her face; in a moment it was gone.

"Let me think," she murmured; "I will tell you another time—to-morrow, it's so very sudden!"

"Sudden!—when we have waited all these years! Sudden! when you came to Kildare to marry me!"

"Ah, yes, it is foolish of me," she said. "Papa would not have wished for any delay. Let it be whenever you please, Antony! You have waited long enough, God knows!"

As she uttered the words, the two drew near to the door of Kildare Castle; the great black turrets of the place seemed creeping towards her as if eager to fold her in their arms. Alma ran up to her room, and,

having gained its solitude, stood with both her hands pressing her aching head. She could still hear the sea moaning, and presently she saw that her window was open, the mist driving in; she closed it, then she pressed her forehead against the cold glass, and stood with closed eyes. Presently the sound of a gong echoed through the house and roused her. She put off her damp clothes, mechanically washed her face and hands, and smoothed her hair, and descended the stairs.

Her head was still full of strange sounds, and she was not able to see clearly. All the lights seemed dim, and everything was unreal. She was aware of being in the dining-room, with her dinner before her, of two male figures being near her, but she was only half-conscious of what she was doing.

Suddenly a burst of hearty laughter rang through the house, and she started as if from a dream.

"Conn, my boy, you're just in time,"

said Mr Ross, as the dining-room door flew open, and Conn, looking handsomer than ever, stepped into the room.

He smilingly nodded to his father and Antony, but walked towards Alma with outstretched hand. She felt her face flushing, her lips smiling, as their hands were clasped together.

"Oh, I am so glad you have come," she said; then, as she turned to resume her seat, she met the eyes of her lover, which had been fixed upon her gloomily, with an expression of sinister suspicion.

. . . . . .

When she found herself alone that night, she did not seek her rest; she sat down before the turf fire, and began to think.

"I was weak and foolish," she said, "just as I was that night when I told him, oh, my God! that my love was unchanged. He believed in me then, he believes in me now. I am not fit to be tried like this! He

cannot be my Antony. I have looked at him, and I cannot find a single trace, and yet he is going to be my husband!"

VI.

From the moment of Conn's return, the life at Kildare Castle underwent a pleasant change. It seemed to Alma at least that the young man's coming was like a burst of summer sunshine after a long spell of wintry fog and rain.

All that night she slept well, and in the morning, when she drowsily opened her eyes, she heard his voice singing gay scraps of song, she saw the sunlight struggling for entrance at her window; and then, when the sound of the voice died, she heard for the first time the musical murmur of the sea as it washed peacefully upon the shore. It sounded quite glad and happy, *now*.

She bestowed extra pains upon her toilet that day, and was pleased at the result.

When she entered the breakfast-room she found bunches of purple heather and wild thyme placed beside her plate, and she knew instinctively that Conn had been out on the cliff to gather flowers for her. When Conn, taking her hand in his, raised it to his lips, she smiled and blushed prettily beneath his gaze; but her face became ghastly pale when Antony, advancing from the shadow, looked in her eyes and placed her chair. What was the meaning of that look she asked herself again and again; why was it that it made her so heart-sick, and turned her cheek so pale; why was it that it tempted her to shrink from her lover, and draw her chair ever so little nearer to that of Conn? Alma never forgot that look. Years afterwards she recalled it with the same secret horror as had filled her breast that bright summer morning.

Meanwhile, Conn, unconscious of what was going on between his brother and the fair young creature to whom he was be-

trothed, plied his knife and fork in a manner which augured well for the healthiness of the mountain air. Now and again he paused to offer some polite brotherly attention to Alma, and to give her a look and a smile which made her blush. She was vexed she could not keep her cheeks cool, for she felt instinctively that Antony was still looking at her, noting in sullen silence every change which flitted over her face.

The girl was beginning to find her old dread of Antony deepening into positive indignation, and on the whole she felt that the meal would have been a pleasanter one if he had found it convenient to remain that morning in his own room. However, at length the meal was finished. Conn pulled down his hat from a peg in the hall, whistled up his dogs, asked Alma if she would like to accompany him in a stroll on the beach, and, on her assenting, the two walked off together.

She had asked Antony if he would go with them, but her lips, not her heart had spoken, and he had refused. As he did so he saw that the brightness of her face, which for a moment had faded, returned.

It was very pleasant to wander along the shore with Conn, and ere Alma had gone many yards she entirely forgot the existence of the moody man who was shut up in the castle, following with jealous eyes the two figures as they passed side by side along the sand. She felt as if a shadow had been lifted from her soul, as if a sunbeam had suddenly shot from heaven bringing with it brightness to the sea, and peace and happiness to every living thing.

From that day the girl's drooping spirits seemed to revive, and the morbid fancies which before had assailed her gradually passed away. She no longer quaked and trembled at every sound. She slept peacefully during the night, a sleep which was unharassed by dreams, and during the dusk

of the evening she was not afraid to pass along the broad corridors alone. She was learning to love the music of the waves, the sweet breath from the hills. She was beginning to feel that to be the mistress of Kildare Castle was not so dark a prospect after all.

But what had come over Antony? In her newly-found happiness Alma had forgotten to note her lover, but now and then his existence was forced upon her, and at such times it seemed that a shadow had crossed her sunshine. For amidst all this change Antony was changing too. Jealousy was gnawing at his heart, and converting the man into a devil. Alma did not notice it, but Conn did, and he shrank from the looks which sometimes crossed his brother's face.

A family tragedy was pending, that was certain.

Conn determined to avoid it, even although the doing so involved the sacrifice of himself. For he knew now, that to

leave Alma would involve a tremendous sacrifice. The girl had wound her way into his careless heart, and made him love as he had thought himself incapable of loving. At first he had admired her for the firmness with which she held to her bond, and he had gone away to avoid temptation, and to uproot from his heart the slight tenderness with which her beauty had already inspired him; but when he returned and saw her so pale and sad, he had felt pity, and since then his pity had melted into a strange sympathy. The change had been so gradual, that for a time he himself did not notice it. But one day, as he was gazing into the hall mirror, he met Antony's eyes steadfastly regarding him, and that look awakened him to his danger.

Conn remained in his room all that afternoon, and in the evening after dinner, when his father had dropped asleep in his chair, and Antony had left the room, he took Alma out on to the terrace to show her the

new moon ; then he told her with outward composure, but inward trembling, that he was going away again.

"Going away?" said the girl faintly, her cheek turning very pale.

"Yes," continued Conn, manfully repressing the inclination which was strong upon him, to kiss her pale cheek and enfold her trembling body in his arms. "I am going for a raid among the mountains again, and I start to-morrow morning, but I mean to get back before your wedding-day."

Conn ceased, and Alma still said nothing. Her face was white as death, and her eyes were fixed upon the pale ray of moonlight which fell faintly upon the sea; she still kept her trembling hand on Conn's arm, but her thoughts were travelling back over that dreary desert of days which she had spent in Kildare Castle while Conn was absent.

She raised her face to his.

"Don't go," she said, "if you have any care, any pity for me; don't go again, and leave me here *alone*. I couldn't bear it. I should go mad, or kill myself,—it wouldn't much matter which."

Conn's hand trembled. Was it possible that Alma loved him? If so, his was a sacrifice indeed.

"Alma," he said, bending above her. "Antony remains here."

The girl started and bit her lip; she could not raise her eyes to his, for they were full of tears.

"Since you are bent on going,' she said, "I suppose we had better say good-bye," and she held forth her hand. He took it in both of his, and drew her towards him again.

"Alma," he said, "you know, or you ought to know, that I would give my life to save *you* pain."

"Then you will stay?" she said quickly.

"Yes, if you wish it, I will stay a little." Then bending over her he asked softly,—"Was it so very dreary when I was away?"

The girl shuddered and clung close to his arm.

"Never mind what it was," she said forcing a laugh, "so long as it is not to be so again. If you had gone off again as you did before, I would never have forgiven you!"

Conn took her hand and pressed it softly. At that moment Mr Ross's voice was heard calling, and the two stepped into the room.

They were both astonished to see Antony sitting in an easy-chair close to the window. For a moment Conn turned rather faint, but when he looked again at his brother, he saw that he was fast asleep.

So at least he seemed.

VII.

So Conn remained, and somehow, since that short interview in the balcony, the subtle charm of his presence was increased tenfold. Outwardly they remained the same. They still took their solitary walks along the seashore, or among the desolate bogs; but often during these lonely rambles Antony appeared, and almost forcibly demanded that the girl should go with him, and Alma yielded, knowing as she did so, that after a brief walk with her lover she could spend all the evening with Conn. For they still played and sang together, while Mr Ross took his *siesta* in his easy chair, and Antony from his shaded nook by the fire watched them gloomily. As each day passed, Antony's face grew darker and darker, and the keenly watched pair began to be afraid to exchange a word. And even when they found themselves

alone they were tongue-tied—full of feelings that would not bear utterance.

Alma knew her weakness, and still she yielded. Every night, in the solitude of her chamber, she recalled the face of Conn. Every morning she came down dreading, yet half hoping, that Conn might be gone; yet, when his handsome face appeared before her, the joyful look in her eyes was unmistakable.

It was this soft look of sympathy bestowed upon him, at least once a day, that kept Conn at Kildare. He knew he was playing a dangerous game, but for the first time in his life he felt within him the sweet mysterious thrills of love, and when his eyes spoke what his lips would not betray, he read the answer in the eyes of his brother's expectant bride.

But Antony loved Alma, and it was this thought which appalled Conn — this thought alone which kept him silent whenever he found himself alone with the girl.

By breathing a word to her he knew that he might crush the one hope which had kept his injured brother alive for years.

One day the announcement was made that strangers were coming to the castle. Two gentlemen from Dublin, who claimed Mr Ross's hospitality through their acquaintance with his son. Alma did not know whether she was glad or sorry, but she affected gladness, and determined to vary the monotony of her existence by giving her small aid to Bridget.

So, for one day at least, the three principal actors in our story were parted. Antony went to meet his friends, Conn roamed off with gun and dogs, while Alma wandered from room to room, doing her best to make the dreary old castle look gay.

She begged the help of Bridget with her toilet that night, and when it was complete she descended, looking prettier than she had done for months. She was late, and when she pushed open the drawing-room

door she saw that most of the company was there. She could see Father Shamus and the curate at the far end of the room. Mr Ross and Antony were eagerly talking with two strange men. Her eyes wandered over to the hearth and rested upon Conn, who looked like a young Adonis in his elegant suit of black.

Alma paused in confusion, and gazed round appealingly at Conn, then Antony came forward with outstretched hand, and the next moment she felt her fingers enclosed in a cold firm grip, while he presented her to the strangers.

Was it only fancy, or did she see them start, gaze from her to Antony, from her to Conn, and then glance significantly into each other's eyes? No, it could not be fancy; Alma seemed to guess their thoughts, for she flushed almost angrily.

The dinner passed off well. Father Shamus was in his best mood, and the strangers talked pleasantly and well. An-

tony alone seemed silent, and secretly oppressed. Again and again he looked at Alma with a strange fierce light in his eyes, which made her sick with fear. It was this feeling of dread which kept her seated when the punch was brought in, and she knew she ought to be away. She had thought it all over, and she knew that if she went to the drawing-room Antony would surely follow her; and, filled with that instinct of self-preservation, she dreaded to be alone with him that night.

So she asked leave to stay, and it was readily granted; and while the gentlemen smoked their cigars and drank their wine, and told their after-dinner stories, Alma smiled and listened well pleased, trying all the time to avoid the light which deepened in her lover's eyes.

Presently the company adjourned to the drawing-room, and then it was Alma's turn

to amuse. She sang her prettiest songs to amuse the strangers, and played some quaint old Irish airs to please the priest. It was not till late in the evening, when both Father Shamus and the curate rose to go, that she wished them all good-night, and retired.

Long after the clock had struck twelve that night, Antony and the two strangers were closeted in the room known as "Mr Antony's study." They had evidently been talking freely, but now neither of them spoke. Antony sat plunged in deep thought, with his eyes on the fire; one of the strangers stood on the hearth, smoking a cigar; the other was idly toying with the leaves of a book; both were watching him.

Presently one spoke.

"Mr Ross, you must decide to-night."

"So soon," said Antony, raising his eyes from the fire.

"Not a moment is to be lost!"

"If I refuse?"

"You will in all probability be shot!"

"For the last two years I have worked for the cause zealously and well."

"Precisely; and you have gone too far to withdraw."

Again there was silence, then Antony spoke.

"When must I go to Dublin?"

"In a few days perhaps, at the latest in a week."

"And when I get there?"

"You will be told your duty. The crisis has come when stern measures are needed. They will be taken."

Again there was silence long and deep. Again Antony stared into the fire with mournful, haggard eyes. Again the two

men watched him keenly. When he raised his head, he looked straight into their eyes.

"I accept," he said. "I will go to Dublin on one condition."

"Name it."

"You must give me a full week here, because—I wish to take with me my wife!"

Love and jealousy had overthrown patriotism.

All that evening the question in Antony's mind had not been What work shall I have to do? but "What shall I do about Alma?" After much weary trouble and thought, he had decided that question, yet the decision seemed to bring little relief to his already disturbed mind.

During that night he walked wearily up and down his room.

In the morning he came down looking pale and weary and old. Alma, glancing at him with gentle, wondering eyes, felt extreme pity mingle with her fear; and when later in the day he asked to see her alone, she granted the request, if not with eagerness, at least without reluctance. They went into the dining-room together.

"Alma," he said, taking her hands, and plunging at once into the very heart of his subject, "this cannot go on;—we must be married at once!"

The girl did not answer. She shivered through and through; then raising her head, she gazed into his face with patient pleading eyes, like some poor dumb brute asking for mercy from its master. She knew that the hour had come when the very inmost thoughts of her aching heart must be spoken. She looked at him long and earnestly, hoping, yet partly dreading, that

he would read her thoughts, and so spare her the pain of speaking. He saw, yet he would not understand. Finding that the girl remained silent, he spoke again.

"Listen to me! Some work I have to do calls me away. I must leave home in a week, perhaps sooner. I have settled to go, but when I go my wife must accompany me!"

This time the girl shrank fearfully from him, and dropped his hands.

"Oh, Antony!" she cried, "pity me, spare me. I—I cannot go."

"Alma!"

"Oh, do not look at me like that. Indeed, I have tried; yes, I have tried so hard, but I have tried in vain. Antony, forgive me! God knows I would not willingly give you pain. I have been weak and foolish. I should have spoken before, but I did not, because—because I was afraid!"

She paused, but he said nothing. Even as she spoke he had turned away, and stood now with his elbows resting on the mantelpiece, his eyes gazing fixedly at the window.

His face was pale and convulsed with acute pain; his lips were bloodless.

Alma was gentle-hearted, and the sight of this silent suffering stirred her to the very soul. She rose and moved towards him; she placed her hand upon his arm, and let it rest there, almost as if she loved him.

"Antony, speak one word, say that you forgive me. Indeed, indeed, it is better thus. The money that my father left you shall be yours just the same as if we had married, and I will respect and care for you always as a friend, and as a *brother*."

As she uttered the last word, Antony

started fiercely, and Alma, perceiving for the first time what she had said, grew crimson.

He turned, and looked at her intently, and the sight of his face made her shrink from him more than ever. He resolutely took her hand, and compelled her to look into his face.

"Yes," he said slowly, "you have spoken the truth at last! Conn has stolen your love from me; it is through *him* you refuse to become my wife!" He added more violently,—"Don't speak, don't answer! Do you think I do not know? Haven't I ears to hear, and eyes to see? Well, it is only on a par with all the rest. Antony may work and slave with a will, but Conn with his cursed smiling face steps in and takes the reward. He supplanted me in my father's heart! *He made me what I am.* I toiled and

slaved for my people here; they scarcely gave me their gratitude, while he was set up as an idol to be worshipped next to God. Yes, he has gathered the prizes, and left me only the blanks, and now he has stolen the only thing which gave me strength to live and endure."

"Antony, will you not hear me?"

"No, I will not hear you; you have said your say; now, listen to me. I tell you there comes a day in every man's life when his endurance ceases. *My* day has come!—why should I strive and suffer? Why should I bow my head in obedience to the will of an unjust God? Why should I pause and hesitate, when I know that, so long as Conn is living, the world will hold neither happiness nor peace for me?"

The girl stared at him in terror; she opened her lips, but the words froze upon

them; her breath came in short, quick pants, but she made no other sound.

"That night," continued Antony, "that cursed night! when I heard that *he*, of all men on this earth, had gone to bring you here, my heart misgave me, and I seemed to feel what there was to come. I said to myself, 'If he leaves me Alma I will forgive him all, and try to forget; but if he takes her from me, I shall *kill* him.'"

The bloodless lips quivered convulsively. With a low, tremulous cry, she threw herself into his arms, and gasped,—

"Antony, he is your brother."

He roughly shook her from him; she staggered back and almost fell. Without one look back, he hurriedly left the room.

Dazed and heart-broken, almost as stupefied as the girl herself, he rushed from the house, and walked with wild strides across the mountain. He had not tried to ques-

tion Alma's decision. Giving his own love freely, he had been too proud to appear as a supplicant for love which could not be as freely returned. But his heart grew hard, his anger and jealousy intense. His one feeling now was a deep and unholy thirst for revenge; a horrible craving to strike against the life of the man who, he believed, had struck so often and so cruelly against his own.

VIII.

Half stunned and utterly powerless, Alma remained for a time cold and silent as a stone. She had staggered back when he cast her from him, and had fallen into a chair; and now she sat with her eyes, dilated with terror, fixed upon the door through which he had passed. Was she going to faint? She feared so. She made

one strong effort, rose, opened the window, and put her head half out to inhale a breath of air.

It was cold, very cold. The day was well-nigh spent; for that dull, grey look on the cliffs and on the sea told of swiftly approaching night. There was a thin drizzle in the air; but though it fell and lay like hoar frost on the girl's golden hair, she hardly seemed to heed. She only knew that the air refreshed her, that the wild burning and throbbing was gradually passing away from her brain, and that she was able to think.

"What must I do?—what must I do?" she cried wildly, pressing her hands against her aching head; "he will kill him, and then— Oh, my God! I think that I shall die."

The house was full of people, but she could not tell her tale to any one. Mr

Ross she knew would gaze at her with mildly reproachful eyes and hush the words upon her lips; while if she told the servants they would raise the neighbourhood with wild cries, but do absolutely nothing. What was done she alone must do, confiding in no one.

Conn was away;—he was off for the day, he told her when he had come to wish her good-bye. He had described to her the route he meant to take, and the house where he would sleep that night—a neighbour's house—only a few miles away. Yes, she knew where to find him — she must go to him now—tell him of his brother's wrath, and beg of him never to return to his home. She felt that Conn would yield, for her sake, and if he would not, why she must go boldly back and sacrifice herself to obtain peace, by becoming Antony's wife.

She opened the door, passed swiftly through the big, empty, desolate-looking hall, and crept stealthily up to her room. She listened: all was silent. She took a cloak to wrap around her head and shoulders, then she descended the stairs again, and ran from the house.

What an evening! cold, grey, desolate, and bleak, with no gleam of sunshine anywhere. The hills were becoming dim in the shadows of oncoming night, the wind was moaning softly, and the sea was sighing as if for the drowned dead. As Alma sped onward, her eyes grew dim and her heart beat quicker and quicker. The places all around her—made familiar through her wanderings with Conn—were almost dear to her that night. For now she knew that he was in danger, now she knew that she must either bid him farewell, or see him lying dead at her feet. Her heart

revealed its secret. She loved him! Yes, she loved him; though she had striven and fought against it, trying with all her woman's strength to follow the path of duty, she knew that she had failed.

With trembling limbs, and wildly palpitating heart, she sped swiftly along the highway, gazing wildly about her for the sight of a well-known form. Presently, turning a corner of the road, she saw, close to her, two men fighting for life.

One was down, the other stood above him raising a knife. With a wild shriek she sprang forward, and the knife fell upon her own breast.

IX.

When Alma opened her eyes, she found herself lying in bed in her own room at Kildare Castle. It was night apparently,

for everything was so still. She lay for a time with her eyes fixed dreamily upon the ceiling, her ears listening attentively, but there came no sound. She turned her head on the pillow and looked around her. Yes, it was her own room; but how strangely changed it seemed! There was a dim light burning on the washstand, and a smouldering red fire in the grate, and near to the fire, seated in an arm-chair, was a woman.

"Bridget," said Alma softly.

The woman started, rose, and came towards the bed. It was Bridget, but how grave her face was; and surely her gentle eyes filled with tears as she bent low and kissed the girl.

"Praise be to the Lord," she murmured; "will ye take a drink, mavourneen, and then try again to sleep?"

The girl moved uneasily, and raised her

hand to push back the hair from her burning brow. What did it all mean? What had happened? Her brain was so confused and weak, she could not think—the past seemed an utter blank.

"Bridget," she murmured, "what is the matter—what has happened—am I ill?"

Then her extreme weakness overcame her; her lips quivered, her eyes filled, and she seemed about to faint.

Bridget, seeing those signs of distress, grew more agitated. She clasped the girl's hand and stroked her cheek as if she had been soothing a crying child.

"Hush, mavourneen, don't cry, for the love of God," she murmured. "No, you're not well, machree; but just drink this, 'twill soothe ye: go to sleep now, just to please Bridget, and in the morning I'll tell ye all."

She took a seat beside the bed, and

continued to stroke the girl's hand gently; while Alma, completely overcome by her extreme weakness, cried quietly for a time, and then sank again into another sleep.

Bridget sat and watched.

As she saw the heavy eyes close, the beautiful lips part, and listened to the heavy measured breathing, her tears fell fast; but her heart was full of thankfulness to God. She felt that the danger was passed, and that, as Alma's strength returned, the heavy sorrow which had hung threateningly above Kildare Castle would surely pass away.

Never would Bridget forget that night, more than a week before, when she had seen Conn enter his father's house with Alma's bleeding and seemingly lifeless body in his arms. For a moment the castle was in a turmoil; a mounted messenger had been despatched for the doctor;

but one of the strangers from Dublin—possessing a little surgical knowledge—had dressed the wound with such rapidity as to save the girl's life. Then he had taken upon himself to telegraph to Dublin for a doctor, and the doctor had come, and after examining the wound carefully, he had said there was little chance for the girl to live. But he had stayed and tended her. And so he and many others had watched her slowly pass out of the shadow of death.

And during all this anxious time, where was Antony? He lay a prisoner in Gulranny gaol. Stricken to the heart with remorse, he had straightway given himself up to justice. And now he, the young master of Kildare, was likely to be tried for murder. No wonder Bridget's eyes grew dim; no wonder her kind heart swelled almost to bursting.

The crisis was passed, but Alma's strength did not return very quickly. For days she lay with closed eyes, only giving signs of life by regular and gentle breathing. Powerless to rise or speak, she was, nevertheless, partly conscious of what was going on around her. She was conscious of people moving in and out of the room; of kind hands clasping hers, or gently bathing her feverish brow; then she heard their voices by her bedside, and one day she was aware of being in the room alone with Conn.

He knelt down by the bed and kissed her thin, white hand, and, as he kissed, she felt his tears upon it; and, though she was so weak and ill, she felt as if she had suddenly passed out of black darkness into the brightness of a summer's noon.

When Alma recovered true consciousness, she opened her eyes in the full light of day.

Her room was empty, but she could hear the sound of feet moving about below, and the occasional barking of the dogs chained in the courtyard. In the grate a peat fire still burnt brightly, and through the uncurtained window her eyes rested upon flakes of falling snow, and snow lay also in little flakes upon the window-frame; and while she lay and gazed, she could hear the sea moaning and sighing as it used to do in the old days when she first came to Kildare.

How long ago that seemed! How much had happened since then! Oh, if she could only find that it had all been a dream!

Suddenly she was conscious of some movement in the room, and, looking round, she saw that in a chair beside the bed sat Mr Ross, his grey head bowed low.

She reached out her hand and touched his.

"Mr Ross," she said, "dear Mr Ross, I

remember everything now; I have awakened, and I remember! How long have I been lying here?—it must be very long, since winter has come. Tell me where is Antony?"

He had been gazing at her up to this; but now, with a terrible look of pain upon his face, he turned away.

"Ah, do not speak! you have told me," she cried; "they have taken him; but do not fear—they shall not harm him, because he has done no wrong. It was an accident—only an accident; I threw myself in his way, and got wounded—that was all. You must send to them—I will write to them—they must set your son free!"

"You will do this?—my child, can you forgive him?"

"Forgive him! Dear Mr Ross, 'tis all of you who have to forgive me. You have had nothing but misery about you since I

came to Kildare, but, when I have seen Antony—I—I will go away!" . . . "It has been very sad and bitter for us all," continued the girl; "if it could have been different I should have been glad—and I tried so hard—so very hard—but it was all too much for me to bear. . . . Mr Ross, give me some paper that I may write—they MUST set Antony free!"

. . . . . .

To obtain Antony's freedom was by no means so easy a matter as Alma had imagined. When the charge of manslaughter had been withdrawn, he was still retained on a charge of high treason!

For, during the time when Alma lay hovering between life and death, there had been a tumult in the village. First came the news of a murder which had been perpetrated in Dublin, and which was so horrible in its details as to freeze the blood of

the most enthusiastic patriot; next came the news that the two men arrested on suspicion had, only two days before the murder, been brought by Antony Ross as guests to Kildare Castle; further inquiries induced the suspicion that Antony, during his last visit to America, had been secretly employed in stirring up rebellion amongst the Irish-American people, and that, moreover, since his return, he had been present at several lawless Ribbon meetings in his own village.

All these were only suspicions; still, as they were grave ones, they had to be carefully and duly weighed. At length, as no tangible evidence could be brought against him, he was informed that, though he would be kept under strict police surveillance, he was free.

The news of the young master's freedom, getting somehow into the air, was wafted to

Kildare Castle almost before the prisoner himself, dazed by the series of horrible events which had lately come to pass, realised that it was true. The news passing from mouth to mouth gladdened everybody, for Antony, despite his strange moods, was popular with the tenants. Bridget piled the fire with logs until the blaze flared half-way up the chimney, while Mr Ross busied himself to see that all was right for the home-coming of his unfortunate son. Still there was a tinge of sadness over all this joy, for that very morning Antony had written to say that if he returned to Kildare Castle he must be greeted with no rejoicing, as at the return of an honourable man; the life that had been saved through Alma's mercy, rather than his goodness, should be fairly prized at last.

Thus it came to pass that Antony made his homeward journey in strict privacy on

a cold dark night, when the earth was thickly covered with a mantle of snow, and clouds gathered darkly above. He dismissed the car which brought him when he was still a mile from home, and turning his face seaward, continued his journey on foot across the dreary snow-covered waste. He had completed half his journey when the clouds became broken, and snow began to fall; it clung coldly about him, saturating his clothes, while the wind, blowing half a hurricane at sea, smote him fiercely in the face.

It was an inclement night, but he was glad of it, for he knew that in such weather the ways must be deserted and no human creatures abroad to witness his sorry return home. So, with one spark of comfort in his heart, he buttoned his coat around him, and resolutely made his way through the storm.

Presently he found himself close to his father's door.

He paused. The sea was roaring heavily, the wind was shrieking, the thin flakes of snow were wildly whirled in the air; even the massive turrets of Kildare Castle seemed to rock beneath the furious clutch of the wind. He walked forward. The dining-room window was uncurtained; he looked in.

The room was empty, save for one form, upon which his eyes remained fixed. A lighted lamp with a green shade stood on a centre table, and a turf fire filled the grate, and lying on a sofa, which was drawn up near to the fire, was Alma. Ah! so changed. She had come to Kildare Castle a young, happy, contented girl; only a few months had passed since then, and yet, as she lay there, with the lamplight and firelight upon her, Antony saw that she had been turned

into a sorrowful woman. And yet she had had the heart to forgive—to intercede for the man who had struck so cruelly at her own.

He moved away from the window. Then he advanced quietly and opened the hall door. Mr Ross was in the hall; stifling a cry of joy upon his lips, he rushed forward to welcome his son; but Antony, after one warm hand-shake, quietly put him aside.

"I want to speak to *her*," he said; and then he entered the room where she sat.

The opening of the door aroused her; she looked round and saw him. For a moment there was silence, then her two hands were impulsively extended, as she cried, sobbing hysterically,—

"Antony, welcome home!"

He came forward, but he did not say a word. He took her white, wasted hand in his. There, upon her third finger, still

glittered the ring which he had sent her, now nearly two years ago—the ring which bound her to him. For a moment his face was irradiated, then the glad light passed altogether from his eyes. Slowly, but deliberately, he drew off the ring and put it in his pocket, then he bent down to kiss her hand.

This was his atonement.

Some time passed, and the silence between them was even more eloquent than words. Then Alma spoke,—

"Antony," she said, "will you let me do one thing to night, that I can think of with gladness till my dying day?"

"Yes, Alma."

She rose and left the room; almost before he had time to think she returned, but not alone. She walked up to the hearth where Antony was standing, took his hand, and placed it quietly in that of Conn.

As the two men stood nervously grasping

each other's hands, Alma sank down upon the couch, and they saw that she was crying.

"Alma," they exclaimed simultaneously; but she looked up smiling sadly through her tears,—

"Do not mind me," she said; "I could not help crying, because I feel so glad I came to Kildare."

X.

A few days of peace and sad contentment, such as had not been known for many a day within the gloomy walls of Kildare Castle; then came a parting—regarded with genuine sorrow on all sides. Antony was about to try his fortunes in America, while Alma had accepted the invitation of some friends to spend the winter in Dublin. This expatriation to America had, in fact, been made the condition of Antony's release

from prison, and he had accepted because he had other, besides political, reasons for wishing to put the sea between himself and Kildare. It was arranged, therefore, that he and Bridget should accompany Alma to the end of her destination, while Antony continued alone on his way across the sea.

It was a long dreary winter, and one destined to be made memorable by a series of horrible crimes. A long-suffering and terribly down-trodden people had arisen at last, determined at all hazards to assert their strength, and cast off the yoke which bound them. Ireland was in revolt—a species of civil war seemed about to ensue ; it was man against man, brother against brother, and the snow which covered the land was in places stained with blood. Weak-minded people grew terribly afraid, and instead of facing the inevitable, hastened

to betake themselves to foreign lands. Amongst these latter were the people whose hospitality Alma had accepted when she thought it her duty to take farewell of Kildare.

"We will go to London for a few months, my dear," said the lady of the house, patting Alma's hand, "and return when this dreadful state of things is over."

"Leave Ireland!" said Alma, with a sinking at the heart; "but there is no danger to us. If they strike, it is only at people who have struck so cruelly at them. Surely you are not afraid?"

"Afraid! well, no—certainly not, dear; but I do not like looking upon unpleasant things when it is just as easy to look at pleasant ones. When I am in London these Irishmen may kill as many of each other as they choose, it wont matter to me; but by spring I trust they will have got rather tired

of the sport, and I shall be able to come comfortably home again."

Alma did not answer. She went up to her room, sat down to her desk, and hurriedly penned the following note :—

"My dear Mr Ross,—My friends, alarmed at the state of things here, have decided to go to London. They have asked me to accompany them, but I feel I cannot leave Ireland. May I come back to Kildare? Yours ever affectionately,

"Alma Clifford."

Two days later, Alma, sitting in the drawing-room at Stephen's Green, was wondering at having received no reply to her letter, when she was somewhat startled by the sudden appearance of Mr Ross. The old gentleman walked forward in his courtly way, and taking

the hands of the astonished girl, said quietly,—

"This is the answer to your letter, Alma. I have come to take you home."

So Alma went back to Kildare Castle, and in two months after her arrival there she became the wife of Conn Ross. They spent the early days of their honeymoon among the Kenmare lakes. After it was over, they returned to Kildare Castle, which was henceforth to be their home.

. . . . .

Thus ended Oona's tale. I read it every word, then I laid the precious manuscript aside, and went to sleep.

The next morning when my toilet was completed, I put the story in my pocket, and leisurely descended the stairs. The breakfast gong had not sounded, so I passed out of the open front door, and was lucky enough to find Oona strolling about among

the trees. She looked half-expectant, half-nervous, as if she longed for, yet dreaded, my opinion on her work.

"Capital!" I cried at once, smoothing back her golden hair, and kissing her forehead. "Where does it all come from, Oona?"

She laughed in a sort of nervous hysterical way, and looked up at me with all the shy delight of a child.

"You really like it, Jack?"

"Very much, indeed. And now for my criticism. If you hadn't told me beforehand that it was true, I should have said it was slightly improbable towards the end."

I thought Oona looked rather crestfallen at this, but she said,—

"Go on, Jack, tell me all you think. If I am ever going to publish anything, I must get used to criticism."

"Well, I will tell you. It struck me as I finished the story, that a man such as you

describe Antony Ross to have been, would never have come to forgive his brother?"

"You don't think so?"

"If you say he did, I suppose he must have done. This proves to you that nature is not art. To make this story artistic and give it verisimilitude—that is to say, to make it *read* like the real thing, you must write a new and a fictitious end."

Oona laughed delightedly.

"All your theories are upset, Jack," she said.

"Are they?"

"Why, the end *is* fictitious! Of course it is. The real story was shocking. Antony and Conn fought that day when they met on the road, and when Alma arrived at the spot to warn Conn not to come home, she saw his dead body on the ground, and Antony standing near with a knife in his hand. Old Mr Ross died of a broken heart, and when Antony's trial

came on, Alma was the principal witness against him."

"Yes, go on."

"Well, she had to speak of course, and the end of it was, that Antony was sentenced to death; but for some reason or other, perhaps on account of the provocation he had received, the jury recommended him to mercy. Afterwards his sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life. He died after being two years in New South Wales."

"And Alma?"

"She gave all her money away to charities, and entered a convent as a working nun. She died some years afterwards. All Conn's money, the Kildare estate, and the castle passed to a very distant branch of the Ross family, but ever since that time no one has ever lived there, and the castle consequently has been allowed to become a complete ruin.

They say it is haunted, that Alma and Conn walk there hand in hand; and several of the *caulighs* aver that they have *seen* the dark figure of Antony sitting on the spot where he murdered his brother."

"And why, may I ask, did you refuse to give us the real truth at the end of your story?"

"Why?" said Oona, opening her blue eyes their widest. "Now, Jack, do you suppose, if I *had* done so, I should ever have got a person to read it?"

A joking reply was on the tip of my tongue, but remembering the manner in which my last attempt of that kind had been received, I very wisely refrained.

"The public," continued Oona gravely, "dislike unhappy endings, therefore I have resolved to make *all* my stories end happily. . . . But, Jack, I wanted to ask you one thing. Would you—would you—"

"Would I—would I? Yes, I daresay I would, darling; but what is it?"

"Well, I mean, if I were to get ready a few more stories like this, would you send them to London for me and get them published somewhere?"

I reflected. I was not the kind of man to do things for nothing, and therefore I replied,—

"Yes, on one condition?"

"Ah, what is that?"

"Merely that for an hour or two every day you allow me to come to your study for the purposes of *literary consultation!*"

Oona readily consented, adding graciously, —"I will take up a box of papa's cigars, so that you may thoroughly enjoy yourself."

END OF VOL. I.

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